

let the sun in

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let the sun in

by [neonpython](#)

Summary

“What would you do,” Dream holds his breath, “if I kissed you right now?”
George’s eyes widen just enough for the light to catch them. His head tilts. “I... I don’t know.”
“Would you let me?”
“... Yeah.”

AKA a storm traps Dream and George in their hotel together, and the close proximity dredges up emotions they thought had long gone.

Notes

I am a sucker for the ‘trapped by a storm together’ trope so here you are. The title’s from Let the Sun In by Wallows, one of my favorite songs ever. Hope you enjoy!

Museum

The thunder rolls over the hotel in thick, eruptive waves. Dream watches the heavy rain blast against the glass through the half drawn curtains in an attempt to fall asleep, tracing the clouds into a dozen different shapes. It's near pitch outside, with flashes of fractal light revealing the sleeping city. He's glad Bad decided to book their rooms so high up, so he gets a clear view of everything below them.

These little snippets of his day are the ones he treasures. Moments where he can forget about streaming, about videos, about his rising popularity. All of his worries melt into calm. At the dead of night, Dream enjoys a glimmer of the world through the lens of a person and not an idol: small and ordinary.

He's glad he let Bad convince him into going on a vacation. After years of working full-time while trying to start his career as a streamer and YouTuber, Dream finally got to a comfortable place to actually take time off. If he's being honest, he doesn't even remember the last time he took a weekend off, much less an entire week. Sapnap was completely on board, while George took some coaxing.

Unfortunately, they didn't have enough money for separate rooms, DC is a popular vacation destination apparently, so they double booked. Bad chose to room with Sapnap, though Dream doesn't know why he insisted on doing so. That means he and George, ever the best of friends, are stuck with each other. Not that Dream is complaining.

From behind him in their king sized bed, George mumbles in his sleep and turns over. Dream pulls out his ear buds that had stopped playing music, sparing a glance over his shoulder, and makes eye contact with his friend. Hand outstretched, face relaxed in sleep. His chest blooms with warmth at the sight.

"Time?" George mumbles.

Dream shrugs. "I dunno, two in the morning?"

"Why're you still awake?"

"Can't sleep." Not a lie, but not the truth.

George huffs and turns to his stomach. Dream catches a glimmer of George's pale legs as he kicks off the blankets, but tears his eyes away to return them to the sky. It's odd, sharing a room with someone he just met earlier that day. Despite knowing each other for years, seeing George in person, and in turn showing his face for the first time.

His voice is the same, so is his face, but actually seeing him? Dream would be lying if he said he doesn't still have goosebumps. Eyes warm like wet earth, hair raven dark and messy from his pillow, and porcelain skin. Dream wishes he could crawl into that bed. He doesn't.

But that's nothing to worry about in the comfort of their hotel room. All he has to think about now is how the hell is he going to fall asleep. Dream sighs, shuts the curtain, and stands up from the ottoman. A strike of lightning illuminates his path to the couch. Dream tosses his jeans and sweatshirt over the nightstand and flops face first onto cushions, not bothering pulling out the mattress underneath. Sleep comes soon enough, but not willingly.

The next morning, Dream wakes up to the sound of the shower running. He sits up, barely lucid

enough to notice that the sun doesn't break through the thrown open curtains. In fact, the same dark clouds he watched cover the entire sky in a patchwork blanket of gray.

He forces himself to sit up and checks his phone on the floor where he left it charging. The showers squeak to a close and George steps out of the bathroom, hair plastered to his face and towel around his waist. Dream pretends not to notice his lack of clothes and goes to grab his own suitcase to take a shower.

"The weather's still shit," he says casually, back facing George so he doesn't have a chance to stare.

"Oh? Yeah, I saw." George chuckles. "Hurry up in the shower, the tour is in an hour."

Dream picks out a pair of jeans and a plain shirt, deciding on just wearing his hoodie again if it gets too cold. "I will, I will, just don't be surprised if the museum gets closed because of the weather."

He feels a smack on his back. He turns and sees a dirty sock on the floor just behind him, obviously used as a projectile.

"Don't jinx us," George says in a stern but playful tone. "Knock on wood."

He just rolls his eyes. "Don't throw your gross socks at me, weirdo."

Dream knocks on the wooden door frame as he walks into the bathroom, and he gets a nod of satisfaction from his friend. When he gets out, fully dressed and prepared to finally eat, he finds George sitting on the bed, phone to his ear.

"No, it's not weird, but he doesn't know," he says, glancing up at Dream. "Speaking of the devil, Dream's finally out of the shower. No, shut up, we'll meet you guys in the lobby."

"Are Bad and Sapnap ready?" Dream asks as George hangs up. He wonders what they were talking about.

"Yup. Come on, we're going to be late."

They make it to the National Air and Space Museums with ten minutes to spare. Bad, the only one smart enough to bring an umbrella, shakes it off at the front doors, untouched by the rain. Dream is glad he hadn't put his hoodie on yet, as it's mostly dry from him hiding it under his shirt. George and Sapnap, however, shiver in their wet clothes.

Outside, the weather remains stagnant, not worsening but not letting up either. Dream glances up nervously, seeing the suspended planes and signs swaying as the storm shakes the building. The room seems designed to be illuminated by natural light, but because of the carpet of black clouds, a thick yellowed glow settles over them.

Bad sifts through keychains as they wait for the receptionist to announce the tour. Sapnap stands under the vent blasting hot air. Dream and George join him, squished together like freezing penguins.

"Do they sell hoodies here?" Sapnap asks Bad.

"I think so," Bad replies, holding up a glass goldfish ornament. "Do you think Zak would like this?"

Dream sees the tag hanging off the string. "Yeah, if you're willing to pay thirty dollars for a piece

of glass.”

“What? Oh, nevermind.” Bad returns the ornament to the rack, frowning in disappointment.

George points to the shelf with snow globes, festive themed given the approaching holidays. “I like that one.”

He’s pointing at one of the bigger snowglobes. The base resembles a brick well, and inside the globe is a brick castle coated with painted glass windows running up the small towers and a thin layer of snow atop the roof. Patches of green bushes surround the castle. The label read Smithsonian Castle Waterglobe.

“It’s also seventy dollars,” Sapnap points out.

George recoils. “Why is everything so expensive here?”

“America’s expensive,” Dream replies.

The receptionist calls them to the backroom to start the tour. An older man, wearing a veteran pilot’s uniform, guides them through the rooms. The buildings shake with thunder. Dream takes a bunch of pictures for his Snapchat. Bad listens intently to the leader of their group, the only one actually into what the man is saying. Sapnap touches almost everything he can reach.

Despite them messing around, Dream finds the space programs interesting. He plans on buying him and his family a few souvenirs.

Once they’re allowed to wander by themselves, they go nuts. George climbs into one of the space shuttles, making Dream take pictures for twitter. Sapnap pretends to be a pilot in a firefight, shouting nonsensical war lingo as the group leader frowns. As the two mess around on the displays, Dream and Bad go to buy lunch.

Bad orders the large pizza as Dream gets drinks. He keeps looking at Dream with a smile, like he knows something.

“What?” Dream asks.

“I’m still getting used to your face,” Bad explains, though Dream suspects he’s lying. “It’s still weird to hear your voice actually come from somewhere other than a discord channel.”

Dream rubs his jaw. He wonders if the growing stubble distorts the image of him in their minds. Maybe he should shave. “You’ve met me before.”

“Yeah, but still. I bet Sap and George are having a field day.”

“Oh, you have no idea how many selfies Sapnap made me take with him,” Dream laughs. “If Dream face reveal starts trending on twitter, we know who’s responsible.”

Bad hands the cashier his credit card. “He wouldn’t do that! Maybe George, just to mess with you.”

At the mention of his name, Dream looks back at George, who records Sapnap trying to climb into one of the fighter planes. He fights a smile, watching his friend’s face go red. His cackles are loud enough to echo.

“So, are you gonna tell him?” Bad’s question redirects his attention.

The words make his heart leap to somewhere he doesn’t want it to go. “Tell him what?”

Bad stuffs the receipt and returned card into his wallet. “That the storm is going to trap us.”

Dream reels his heart back in. “Oh. I won’t, he already thinks that I jinxed us.” He and Bad find a table to sit at as they wait.

“Of course, the two Floridians are the only ones aware of how bad the storm is. I just hope we don’t get stuck in the hotel.” Bad sighs, tapping his fingers against the metal surface.

Dream glances back at their two friends. They’re walking towards them, laughing amongst each other. “At least you got us a really cool hotel. It has an arcade, a pool, a bar, and so many other cool things.”

“What cool things?” George plops down beside Dream.

Sapnap sits beside Bad, grinning with that same smile the oldest wore before. Dream ignores it.

“The hotel, it’s got a bunch of things to do inside,” he says.

Bad’s name is called, and he stands up to grab the pizza. “Hey, Dream, help me?”

“Uh, sure.”

The two walk snack up to the pizza parlor. Dream holds the pizza while Bad tips the woman behind the counter.

“Why’d you ask me to come with you?” He asks.

Bad takes the pizza away. “No reason.”

Dream scowls. “You’re a terrible liar, Bad.”

“I dunno, I tricked you a lot in manhunts.”

“Only because you’re silly.”

“Sure, Dream, sure.”

Back at the table, Sapnap and George talk in hushed voices. George’s cheeks glow a dusty pink, which quickens Dream’s heartbeat to a steady rhythm. When they see Bad and Dream approach, they abruptly shut up.

They eat the pizza in a tense silence that settles like the storm clouds above them. It has to do with what George and Sapnap talked about. Something Bad didn’t want Dream to hear.

Lightning crosses George’s face, still rosy. His nose scrunches in thought, nibbling at his pizza slice. Dream considers asking what they were talking about but decides against it, knowing they’d just deflect the question.

He notices George still shivering beside him. “Are you still cold?”

George looks at Dream, then Sapnap. “A little,” he confesses.

“Here.” Dream grabs his hoodie from the back of his chair and tosses it into George’s lap.

“What about you?” George stares down at the lime green fabric, frozen like it’s a landmine.

“I’m planning on buying a hoodie from the souvenir shop, don’t worry.”

Sapnap snickers.

“Okay, what is up with y’all?” Dream shoots Sapnap a playful scowl. “We get pizza and then boom- weird.”

“Yeah, Georgie Poo, what’s up with that?” Sapnap asks mockingly.

George kicks him from under the table. “Shut up, Sap.”

Bad, ever the dad friend, steps in. “Sapnap, stop it. Let’s have fun, the week is going to be a long one and I don’t want it to be awkward.”

The storm cloud lifts. “Okay, okay. Not my fault George is such a lame-o.”

“Lame-o? How mature of you,” George rolls his eyes, smiling.

Dream laughs and nudges him. “You should change your channel name to George-Lame-O.”

“Shut up, Dream. At least my name is original and not a word.”

“Hey, I came up with your name!”

Lunch passes as the thunder outside grows louder. They laugh, they tease, and they eat the entire pizza. While they go to exit the museum, Dream stops at the souvenir shop. He buys himself an Apollo 13 hoodie, a pair of bracelets for his mom and sister, and the snow globe.

Just in case.

Elevator

Chapter Summary

they get back from the museum, but the storm starts to mess with the power. dream is as flirtatious as he is sleep deprived. too bad george gives him a piece of his own medicine

Chapter Notes

sorry if updates aren't consistent, I try to stockpile chapters in case I get writer's block later on! third chapter should be up in a few days! <3

Returning to the hotel proves to be a harder feat than leaving it. The storm covers the sky entirely, the rain coming down on the group harsh enough to sting. Bad bought them all umbrellas, so they cower under their plastic shields. Unfortunately, the wind carries the smaller droplets sideways, smacking against their backs as they hurry down the winding streets. Despite the extra layer of protection, George refuses to put on Dream's hoodie, muttering something about not wanting it to get soaked.

“Your loss,” Dream had told him, but he didn't take it back.

They stumble into the lobby, soaked to the core. Dream peels off his new hoodie, which had tried nobly to keep him dry, and stuffs it beside the wrapped gifts in his plastic bag. The air circulating cools him further. Screw hotel lobbies for being so damn cold.

“I'm going to change,” he says, wanting nothing more to get dry clothes and a thick blanket to keep warm. “Do you want to meet back here later?”

Bad glances out the front doors. “I don't know, this storm isn't letting up.”

“I think we should call it early, fellas.” Sapnap's teeth chatters. They all mumble in reluctant agreement. “I'm going to get some movies and hot chocolate packets from the shop.”

“Can you get us some too?” George shivers as he speaks.

“Sure thing. See you guys upstairs.”

Dream heads towards the elevators, George joining him. He clutches the lime hoodie to his chest, which drips wet from the torrent outside. Music plays over small speakers. Surprisingly, it's not classical music. It's an actual song. A calming one, with trumpets and a soft, summery melody.

What are the words saying? Something about loneliness, fear... how fitting. They fizz in and out, breaking through the constant static of the crackling radio station.

The elevator dings, arriving at their floor, but the doors don't open. George frowns in confusion. Dream presses the open button. Nothing happens.

“Uh, they’re supposed to open, right?” George asks.

“That’s what doors do.” Dream presses it again, jamming it. “Maybe they’re just delayed.”

George hits the emergency button. “What the fuck? Try calling someone.”

He nods, pulling his phone out.

“How ironic, the music’s talking about the sun, but I haven’t seen it in two days,” Dream grumbles, holding the speaker up to his mouth.

The phone rings, rings, rings, and clicks. Before either can say anything, the lights in the elevator flicker then turn off. The song cuts off as well.

“Oh my god,” George says, his pitch rising with fear. “Are we- are we trapped? Is the elevator gonna drop?”

“Hey, it’s okay, the brakes suspend us, not the power.” The emergency lights turn on. “See?”

“What do we do?”

Dream presses the emergency button again. “Wait, I guess.”

George groans in protest.

“What other choice do we have?” He hops once, making George press himself into the hall. “It’s not like we can go anywhere.”

“I know. Doesn’t mean I have to enjoy it.”

They glance at each other, then at the doors. Dream pulls his phone out. If they’re going to wait for someone to get them out, he might as well look for that song playing.

“Hey, do you remember the lyrics?” He asks.

“Uh, darling, something, something, let the sun in?” George shrugs. “I’ve never heard it before.”

Darling slips from his tongue like it’s always been there, casual and lilted by his accent. Dream searches for the lyrics as best as he could, skipping through a few Beatles songs. Finally, Spotify comes in clutch, and he lands the jackpot. *Let the Sun In* by the Wallows.

Fishing out his AirPods, he offers one to George, who takes it. Dream presses play, already adding it to his collage of playlists. He can actually understand the lyrics now.

*Help me darling, now I’m feeling lonely
Help me darling, now I feel afraid*

George laughs. “You’re feeling lonely, Dream?”

Dream rolls his eyes. “Nah, I’m feeling pretty afraid of your face, though.”

*Help me darling, now I’m feeling older
And I know the time, it doesn’t wait*

It takes a moment for George to respond. “Haha. You are hilarious, Dream.”

In the red emergency lights, George glows. His dark hair casts burgundy shadows across his face, lips pursed as his head bobs slightly with the melody. Dream's heart doubles in tempo. He drifts his gaze to George, who appears zoned out.

*Help me darling, now I'm feeling tired
Help me darling, now I'm feeling low*

Soft lashes flutter against George's cheeks. His mouth, pressed into a thin line, He readjusts his grip on Dream's hoodie, pulling it closer into his body. Dream wonders what it would feel like, to have those hands in his own. Around him instead of his jacket.

*Well honey, I just wanna let the sun in
Let the day just come and go*

“I wish the sun would come back.” George’s head thunks against the wall. “Bloody storm is messing up our vacation.”

Dream lets out a small chuckle.

*And I just want to find
Oh, I just want to find
All the secrets that you keep inside*

The lyrics stir his gut into a whirlpool. Swirling, sucking him down. This wondering, a wandering what if, is going to drive him nuts. Dream mentally sighs.

George slowly looks up at the sound he doesn’t realize he made out loud. “What’s wrong?”

“Why don’t you hold me like that?”

Dream doesn’t know if the lights are affecting his eyesight, but he swears that George’s cheeks darken. The words worming their way into his heart repeat. He wishes he hadn’t said anything. His words drip with too much want, no humor to be found in the Freudian slip.

“Like what?” George asks.

A low rumble echoes in the distance.

“Like… this!” Dream sets the bag down and pulls George into a crushing hug.

As George squeals in protest, trying to release himself from his grip, Dream spins him around, careful not to shake the elevator. A hand smacks the top of his head. After a moment of coddling, Dream finally lets him go, dark eyes narrowing in false annoyance.

“I hate you,” George hisses, “you touchy weirdo.”

“Aw, you know you love me. Just admit it, George.”

He sticks his tongue out at him. “As if I could.”

Dream slaps a hand over his mouth, a wheeze escaping. “Did you just admit you love me?”

“Wha- where did you even get that from?”

“As if you could admit you love me, meaning you love me!” He reaches for George’s face. “Aw, you should’ve just told me. I love you too, Georgie-Poo!”

George grabs his wrists and pushes him away. “Stop it, Dream, you’re so annoying. That’s not what I meant.”

“Then what did you mean?”

His question falters as lights above them return, and the elevator dings as the doors of their metal prison open. Dream thanks the universe for not letting the moment turn awkward and picks his gift bag back up. George walks out first, loudly complaining about being stuck inside the elevator with an imbecile.

As soon as Dream gets his key card in, they storm their room, heat already blasting through their air conditioner. He nearly cries from relief. The gift bag falls into his open suitcase. George collapses face first onto the bed, disregarding the wet clothes still clinging to him.

“You might wanna change before the sheets get wet,” Dream says.

George immediately sits up and peels his shirt off, not giving Dream enough time or warning to look away. Before he can stop it, his gaze locks onto his chest, already pale skin turned silky white from the cold. He’s thin, so the smooth transition from his chest to stomach makes an intoxicating slope for Dream’s eyes to take.

The more he stares the more his friend resembles a Roman statue. George is all sharp lines, smooth surfaces, muscle faint under flesh. Dream wonders what his hands would feel like to run his hands through George’s frizzy hair, down the marble column of his neck, and across his shoulders. His mind wanders lower as his hands do as well, imagining the tough sinew of his arms, cold fingers, bony hips.

Heavy thunder lets out its unruly roar at the same time lightning brightens the room. George tosses his shirt to the floor, reaching to remove his pants, and the wandering thoughts shatter. All the blood rushes to Dream’s face. He looks up so fast his neck cracks, spinning on his toes.

“Jeez, dude, warn a dude next time before you start stripping.” He keeps his voice steady. If George even knew what he was thinking, he might implode.

“You’re the one who wanted me to change. Can’t take what you dish out?”

He rolls his eyes, knowing his friend can’t see him. “You’re so annoying. I didn’t mean get naked.”

The pants pass through the corner of his vision as it hits the cold tile floor with a splat.

Dream grins as a thought bubbles up. He has no self control, and the song playing on repeat in his ear fills him with confidence. After a moment of thinking, Dream grabs the corners of his shirt, slowly pulling it over his head. The hot air warms him as the fabric leaves his frigid skin. George sucks in a sharp breath.

His reaction stirs that whirlpool in Dream’s stomach to Monsoon levels. He pulls his shirt off the rest of the way, letting it fall to his feet, and kicks his shoes off. Dream starts to fiddle with his belt, and George finally speaks.

“What... what are you doing?”

He glances over his shoulder. George sits at the foot of the bed, frozen with his eyes locked onto Dream’s back. The soft laboring of his breath sends prickles up his spine. The thick rushes of rain bang against their glass balcony door.

“What, can’t take what you dish out?”

This time, Dream makes his words intentionally sarcastic. The dusted pink returns to George’s cheeks. He likes that color on him.

His thoughts don’t frighten him like they used to. He knows how he feels about George, even if he’d never act upon them. And he also knows that George would never reciprocate. But Dream loves to watch him react to him like a shock every time, without fail.

“So, this is how you *really* are outside of calls.” George’s smile assures him he didn’t go too far with the joke, if it even was a joke to begin with. Dream tells himself a lie. “Still an idiot.”

“Yeah, but I made you blush. Point for me.”

“It’s not a competition.”

Dream’s eyes flicker down before latching back onto the ceiling. He waits for George to collect his clothes and lock himself in the bathroom door before sinking into bed, pushing his pants off.

As soon as he’s alone, he can breathe. Dream finds and slips on a pair of sweatpants and a long sleeve shirt. He lies down on the bed and watches for the lightning strikes that become too frequent for his taste. George was right, he hasn’t seen the sun since they landed. The music switches from the repeating song to random shuffle as he stares out of the balcony door, time passing unbeknownst to him.

Dream hates his mind. No matter how far he wanders, how far his thoughts sweep him away, he always returns to one topic.

Something about their proximity knocks Dream out of his otherwise casual persona. He isn’t as smooth as he is over Discord or Teamspeak. Now he sees George’s reaction in real time, hear his laugh without interference. Dream can’t hide behind his faceless profile anymore, like he could ever keep something from George.

Except he can. It’s not a secret, how he reacts to George’s voice like a shot of dopamine. The words haven’t made a home in his heart yet, he hasn’t been able to tell himself how he feels and not shove them as far down into the pit of his stomach as he can muster.

Dream would rather walk into the ocean than ruin the friendship they spent years building together. George is rabbity; if Dream moves too fast, he’ll surely bolt. He’d die if that happened.

Outside, the sharp white strike of lightning hits, followed too closely by thunder. The lights above him dim. His mind drifts from George to worry. The worsening weather is soon to impede their plans. Dream knows Bad had a bunch of different activities in mind, and he doesn’t want their first vacation together to get rained out. He doesn’t want to leave with any more what if’s.

The bed dips beside him, making him jump, and a foam cup appears in front of him. George’s face pushes into the foreground of his mind.

“A peace offering.” He chuckles as Dream refocuses his sights. “I was talking to you for like, ten minutes straight. Did you not hear me?”

Dream looks over his face, and he wonders if his cheeks are as soft as they look. “Sorry. I really like storms.”

George hands him the steaming cup of hot chocolate and wraps both hands around his own,

snuggling further into the duvet wrapped around his shoulders. The two sit in the comforting hum of heavy rain and Arctic Monkeys still playing through. Cottony charcoal clouds circle around the hotel.

“What’s so nice about it?” George asks.

“Huh? Oh, the storm.” Dream lifts the cup to his lips, tentatively poking the scorching liquid with the tip of his tongue. “Honestly, I don’t know. They’re calming for me, and they help me sleep. It’s nice to have something… louder than my head, I guess.”

He feels George glance at him. “The rain in Brighton never gets this bad. We get drizzles, sometimes thunder, but this is the end of days kinda shit.”

“Come and visit more often, you’ll get used to it.”

The hot drink spreads like thick honey through Dream, starting at his hands and ending in his toes. He touches his face, fingers heating his cheeks further. George leans into him. Even with the barrier between them, Dream feels the searing heat of George’s body.

“This is nice. Just us for once.” He hums, sipping at his cup.

Dream tilts his head so it rests against his friend’s shoulder. A surprised puff escapes George’s lips. He forces himself to exhale the breath he held, the tension slowly leaving his body as George hums to the music.

“Let’s just hope we’re not stuck here for the next week,” Dream says, feeling the vibrations of George’s chuckle in his chest. “I’m going to get sick of you real quick.”

Flood Warning

Chapter Summary

tempted to drop out of college and become a twitch streamer

Dream doesn't move when George falls asleep on him. His airpods died hours ago, when the clouds weren't clouds of ink blotting out the stars, and his chocolate was still hot. He lies at the end of the bed, keeping as still as possible so he doesn't move George's head too much. His breaths slow down to avoid his chest bouncing as rapidly as his heart.

Thunder seduces him with the promise of peaceful sleep. He tries not to give in, but the part of his mind running on a wheel is silent for once. Normally, Dream has to stay up for days to get a decent amount of sleep, tiring his body out for the few hours he can spare not working. He hasn't slept properly for weeks, his brain refusing to give in, but he's finally reached his limit. The warmth of George holding him to the bed drags him down.

The storm follows him. He finds himself standing in the middle of a street, no cars or pedestrians in his sight. It's not a familiar street, he can't find any road signs or discernible logos on buildings. Rain pounds against his back despite no clouds in the sky, flooding the empty road. Dream looks around, the water reaching just above his ankles.

Cars sit parked along the streets, nobody inside, and the buildings around him feel too compact, too tall to be real. They block out the sky except for a strip of murky cerulean, turned gray by the falling rain. He stomps through the water, unsure where to go. As he treads forward, the cold dampness creeps up his legs, slowing his trek down to a waddle.

He has a hard time keeping afloat.

The rain stops around the bottom of his ribs, giving Dream optimal time to breathe in before it comes down again like a tsunami. It sweeps him under immediately. Dream spins, disoriented, and claws for anything to stop his spiral. Desaturated blue surrounds him from all sides. He can't tell which side is up or down. His lungs burn, sharp stings tempting him to open his mouth on the off chance he'll find the sky again.

The corners of his eyes darken. Dream needs air, he needs to *breathe* .

Something grabs the hood of his jacket and jerks him to the left. He breaks the surface, the intake of air enough to render him conscious. A man holds him, laughing at his goldfish gasping.

“You’re so clueless, Clay,” George huffs out between his laughter.

Dream laughs along with him, but he doesn't know why. “Where- where did you come from?”

“The UK, dummy. Look.”

George points up. Dream realizes that the rain has stopped, exposing the deep rich navy of space. Stars cover the sky like freckles. He can see Ursa Minor, Ursa Major, Cassiopeia, and the entire Orion constellations.

“Woah.” The view reminds Dream of a photograph on display in the museum, enhanced and brightened by his mind. “It’s beautiful.”

“*You’re* beautiful.”

His head turns. “What?” He speaks with the same panting laughter, wondering when the punchline is coming.

George looks at him, leaving him as breathless as drowning. Every time Dream lies his eyes upon him feels like the first. He smiles, that cheek cramping grin Dream only sees in rarity on streams. Nothing about his appearance has changed except for that damned smile.

“What, are you deaf? You’re beautiful.”

Dream realizes they’re too close. George’s arm still clutches his hood, arm holding them chest to chest. Their breathing synchronizes.

“Shut up,” he says. He doesn’t really mean it.

A low buzzing fills his body head to toe, a coffee injection right into his veins. Dream touches George’s cheek.

He nuzzles into Dream’s hand. “Do you think I’m lying? Do you not believe that you can be loved?”

“It’s hard to believe anything when I push you all away.” A smile of his own surfaces to match. “But with you, I could believe anything.”

A strike of lightning wakes Dream, eyes opening at the feeling of the room shaking. His heartbeat rings in his ears. He looks around in the dark, tugging at the collar of his shirt, and pats the bed around him in search of the man who’d been lying on him. After a moment of blind smacking, he hits soft flesh. George had turned over in his sleep, which allows Dream to get up without disturbing him.

His feet are cold. The faint taste of chocolate turning stale lingers on his tongue. Warm air suffocates Dream as he kicks his shoes off and picks up one of the key cards. The faded yellow lights in the hall flicker in unison to the thunder claps, lightning flashing unpredictably through the windows. He doesn’t know where he’s going, he just needs to walk, drain his limbs of whatever energy remains in him.

Luckily, the door to the stairs is unlocked, so he takes it, not wanting to risk getting trapped in the elevator on his own. He takes in a slow inhale as the cold lobby air hits him. A little exploring never hurt anybody. Dream wanders around the lobby, seeing stray tourists arriving late to the hotels. Outside, the streets appear flooded. The rain continues its merciless assault against the earth.

He circles the halls, trying to memorize the layout. In the back half of the hotel, hidden behind the gym, he finds the pool, which has a hot tub. The arcade is crammed between an empty buffet and a mimicry of a Vegas poker room. There are three restaurants as well, which surprises him, all of them empty of patrons. A man stands behind the bar outside of the larger restaurants, wiping down the counter with a rag.

Dream returns back to the main lobby after an hour or two of wandering, time slipping through his fingers faster than he can keep up. He thinks back to the day before, how it started well enough with the museum tour and ended with him and George falling asleep together. His head, an anchor

on Dream's chest. The lights dim to near pitch black and return to normal.

“What the hell are you doing up?”

At the sound of his friend's voice, Dream spins around. Sapnap lounges in one of the lobby couches, wrapped in a blanket and hoodie. He holds a steaming cup, Dream assuming it's yet another hot chocolate.

“Can't sleep,” he mutters.

Sapnap raises an eyebrow. “That's it?”

“What can I say, insomnia's a bitch.” He plops down beside Sapnap, trying not to touch the chilly metal armrests.

“Yeah, I feel that,” his friend says. “When's the last time you got a good night's sleep?”

He doesn't respond, which is enough of an answer on its own.

“What's keeping you up now?” Sapnap asks.

“It's... complicated.” Dream pulls a loose string on his sleeve.

Rain drowns out the music playing over the staticky radio. He lifts his feet on the freezing tile floor, pulling his knees to his chest. The warmth from his sleep begins to seep out from his toes, and the lack of George's presence leaves Dream feeling heavy.

Sapnap speaks again, voice low and kinder. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“I dunno, I can't even say it in my head.”

“Say what?”

Dream digs his fingers into his bicep. “George.” It's the only word he can muster.

A streak of white light crosses Sapnap's stunned expression. “Oh. Oh!”

He wishes he could slam his head into a wall. His skin crawls. Despite it being just a simple answer, it holds so much meaning, and that sends a spike of terror through him.

“So, do you, like, have a crush-”

“*Nick*.”

The hotel shakes with a vicious crash of noise. His friend blinks. Sapnap scratches his cheek, sucking air through his teeth.

“Honestly, I don't know what I feel,” Dream confesses. “Or if what I'm feeling is real or just me being overwhelmed by this whole situation. I mean, meeting all my friends for the first time, it's bound to bring stuff out, right? But that doesn't mean it's what I want.”

Sapnap tilts his head, brows knitting together. “Do you know what you want?”

Dream shakes his head. He doesn't know why he's so nervous. He's had deep conversations with Sapnap before, just not in person. It's different in person.

“No. Not yet, I’m still trying to accept what I’m feeling. It’s hard to understand what’s going on inside my own head, everything keeps mixing together and… bubbling over. Like a boiling pot.”

“I’m sorry, man. That sounds tough.” Sapnap pats his shoulder. “So, you’re not going to do anything about it?”

“No, are you kidding? I don’t even know what I want yet.” Dream snorts.

His stomach growls. He ignores it.

“He’s my best friend, Sap. I’m not going to risk ruining our relationship over something that’ll fade once I go back home.”

Sapnap sighs, smiling sympathetically. “Maybe some sleep will help you figure it out.”

They start to stand, and Dream realizes something. “Wait, why are *you* awake?” He asks.

“Bad wanted me to make plans for tomorrow, so I was looking up some places to visit.” Sapnap holds his phone out. “Plus, he snores like a rocket taking off.”

Dream laughs as they step into the elevator. Talking about his confusion helped relieve some of the tension in his mind. “You should totally tweet that.”

“You kidding?” Sapnap chugs the rest of his drink. “He would kill me!”

The elevator works, and they make it to their floor without incident. Sapnap turns to Dream before they part down the hall.

“Think about what you want. Once you figure that out, everything else will be fine,” he says, shooting him a thumbs up.

“Thanks, Sapnap.” Dream waves as his friend enters his room, turning towards his own door.

Inside, George is curled into a ball, half of the duvet hanging off the bed. Small puffs of breath escape his lips as he sleeps, softly muttering under his breath. His hair clings to his forehead.

Dream smiles softly and tosses the rest of the blanket over George, who snuggles into it. He thinks about falling asleep beside him. Instead, Dream crawls back onto the couch, fully dressed, and stares at the ceiling until the sun comes for him.

--

“What do you mean, flood warning?”

Dream and Bad stand in the breakfast buffet line, waiting to use the waffle maker. Their plates hold as much food as they could manage to sneak before Bad started to feel guilty. Sapnap and George guard their table with a wall of apple juice boxes and syrup cups.

“Yeah, have you seen how hard it’s been raining?” Dream shows Bad his weather app. “Most places will probably be closed today.”

As Bad scans through the warning issued earlier that afternoon (they all slept in), the television broadcasting news begins to blare. A red bar appears above the news anchor, displaying the same words Dream had just relayed.

All the hotel patrons groan in unison.

“What are we supposed to do now?” Bad huffs, frowning down at his plate of fake eggs.

“We’ll figure it out,” Dream responds, heart aching for his friend. “Don’t worry about it, Bad. No matter what happens this week, we’re going to have fun.”

That seems to alleviate some of his worries. “I hope Sapnap found some cool places to visit that will be open. Did you see what he tweeted this morning? I do not snore!”

Dream throws his head back in a wheezing laugh. “Dude, you totally do!”

“What? No!”

“Yeah, you sounded like a freight train on the plane here!”

Bad turns a shade red. “That’s because planes are super uncomfortable! Don’t be mean, you muffin head.”

They make it to the front of the line, and before they know it, all four dig into their mound of breakfast delicacies. Bad splits the waffle with Dream, who drowns his plate in maple syrup.

George dunks three teabags into his cup of hot water, adding enough honey to feed a hive. His plate consists of two pieces of toast, a chocolate muffin, and bits of Dream’s eggs he keeps stealing off the plate.

Sapnap rearranges the juice boxes to surround his plate, spilled juice clinging to his beard. Sometimes Dream forgets Sapnap is the youngest. He looks and acts mature for his age; at least, when he’s not placing bets on how many pieces of French toast he can fit into his mouth at once.

“You’re going to choke,” Bad warns him just as Sapnap begins to sputter. “Called it.”

“Okay, Dad,” George mocks him.

Dream chokes on his coffee. “Dadboyhalo!”

Bad rolls his eyes. “Okay, okay, I get it. I’m the oldest, so I’m the dad.”

He’s not wrong. Although Bad isn’t much older, if the birthday he told them is even true, Dream does look up to him. Even with the small following he has, he never fails to try and brighten everyone’s day. Bad is kind, understanding, and a hell of a lot smarter than people give him credit for. If they ever listened to him during manhunts, Dream would have a hard time winning.

The three begin to chant. “Dadboyhalo, Dadboyhalo, Dadboyhalo!”

“What am I, Beetlejuice? Stop it, you muffins!” He shushes them as people look over in annoyance. “What if people recognize us?”

“Think of the odds, someone staying in this hotel who happens to watch our videos,” Dream says, his wheezing dying down.

George takes a swig of his tea. “You do have thirteen millions subscribers.”

“Yeah, but *your* face is the one everyone will recognize first. Who could ignore this hottie?”

Dream reaches across the table to pinch George’s cheek, only for his hand to be swagged away. He pretends not to notice the blush crawling to his ears.

“Okay-“ Bad claps his hands. “Sappitus Nappitus, what’s on the schedule for today?”

Sapnap fumbles for his phone. “Uh, so a lot of the tourist spots around here are either outside or closed, but I found a few. Most of them are museums too.”

“I like museums,” Dream chimes in.

George and Bad nod when Sapnap looks at them for approval.

“We can hit up the Museum of Natural History, the Museum of American History, and the National Gallery of Art.”

A moment of silence passes. Sapnap raises a brow, leaning forward. “So... where do you guys wanna go first?”

“Why don’t you choose this time,” Bad suggests. “We can take turns picking places.”

“Alright, Natural History it is.”

Dinosaur Bones

Since they're not complete idiots, Bad calls them an Uber. All the local taxis closed because of the storm, but the few cars in the street had plenty of open seats.

They make it inside without getting too drenched. A few people turn to stare at them as they barged into the national museum, looking like they just escaped a foot chase. Chilled air blasts Dream in the face, making him grateful he's wearing his newly bought jacket. Bad shakes his wet hair out, which has gotten significantly longer since he shaved his head.

Sapnap approaches the receptionist to ask for tickets to the next tour. George, to Dream's surprise, wears his lime green hoodie from the day before. It fits him a hair too big. Though he doesn't say anything about it, his heart soars every time he sees the small black smile printed onto the fabric.

A crowd clusters around the elephant statue in the middle of the room. Just like the last museum they visited, the room seems designed to be lit by the sun, which continues to be hidden by storm clouds. Dream looks upward, scanning the open floors that run along the interior of the entrance. Pillars line the marble walls, lit by electric lamps.

"That's a big ass elephant." George tugs at the jacket's loose fitting sleeves.

"Language," Bad chastises, going through his phone. "Apparently, the storm is tropical, and it might turn into a hurricane."

Dream groans loudly. "Damn it."

Sapnap joins them, holding up four tickets and a couple of pamphlets.

"The tour doesn't start for another thirty minutes, so we can just look around until then," he hands the pamphlet to Bad.

The crowd disappears, presumably being escorted for the tour. That leaves them enough space to walk around without messing with any other tourists, and knowing his friends, they will definitely be a disturbance.

Bad reads out the displays off the pamphlet as they wander through the open rooms. In the hall of dinosaurs, Dream fights the temptation to climb the T-Rex skeleton, even though George dares him to. Sapnap looks enraptured by the attraction. He bounces between displays, giddily snapping pictures and reading off every label attached to the dinosaur skeletons.

While the three continue to examine the room, Dream sneaks to the bathroom. He washes his hands, listening to the sound of a woman explaining their newest display. Suddenly, a boom shakes the building, sending him into darkness. Dream hears the soft crackle of the fluorescent bulbs fizzle out.

"What the..."

He dries his hands off on his jeans and steps out. In the ceiling, soft, white emergency lights blink to life. They barely illuminate his path, so he drags his hands along the walls to avoid running into anything as he finds his way back. When the hallway opens up into the next room, Dream can't see further than a few feet in front of him.

It feels like the moment he walks into the room, the temperature drops twenty degrees. The

darkness pushes against him from all sides without much light to navigate the unfamiliar space. Dream blindly stumbles forward. His arms flail in an attempt to find anything to ground himself, and bumps into what he thinks is a display case. He pats the cool glass awkwardly.

“Guys?” He calls out.

George’s voice echoes from somewhere ahead of him. Dream sees the silhouette of his friend waving at him and surges forward. He only gets a few yards before he trips, spiraling down to the cold marble floor.

A small phone light shines his way. “Are you okay, dude?”

Dream sits on his butt, rubbing his palms. “Yeah. My dignity, on the other hand...” He grabs the outstretched hand, pulling himself back to his feet.

“Where’d you go?” George asks him.

“Bathroom, the lights just went off and I got lost.” Dream flinches as the phone light points right into his eyes. “Jesus, control your beam.”

George laughs. “My *beam* ?”

“Yeah, turn it off before you blind me.”

As Dream grabs to take the phone, George pulls away. He keeps it just out of reach, backing up into the middle of the room. Dream laughs then goes for it again, only for his hand to barely miss it. They enact their small dance, Dream goes for the phone and George moves out of the way just before he can take it. This goes on for a few minutes, both giggling in the darks like adolescent boys during a sleepover.

Finally, George backs himself into a corner, pressed against the edge of the T Rex case. The platform reaches up to his waist. George lifts the phone over his head, grinning like he’s beaten him. His phone light shines down on him. Dream almost lets him take the win, the love of seeing George’s smile enough to quench his competitive nature.

Unfortunately, Dream towers over him. After half a second of considering whether this is a bad idea or not, he plants his right hand over George’s head, closing him into the confines of his body. Their heavy breaths fog the air. Splotches of pink accentuate his cheeks. Dream tilts his head, resisting the temptation to get any closer.

God, he’s so beautiful. How did Dream live without seeing him up close before? He can’t help but stare, trying to memorize the imperfections in his face. The bloody inside of George’s lip where he’d chewed through skin, pink spots of fading acne on his cheeks, a darkened shadow around his jaw from not shaving, the dark crevices under his eyes that the quivering phone light casts further shadows into.

He wants a reason to pull away. Dream wants his heart to slow down, for his legs to stop shaking, for George to not look so damn cozy in his hoodie.

“You’re, uh.” George looks down, jaw clenched. “You’re kind of close.”

“Are you uncomfortable?”

“No.”

The temptation to touch him overwhelms Dream's senses. Before his brain tells him otherwise, he glides his other hand over the soft cherry glow of his cheeks. George inhales sharply. Dream's hand lands on the back of his neck, tangling in the short dark hair. Just the simple touch sends full body shivers through him. He doesn't know if it's his mind playing tricks, but George leans into his hand.

Dream short circuits as their eyes meet. George's lips part slightly, his raised arm dropping to his side. The light leaves his face. He raises his free hand, grazing his jaw. His fingers are matches against a striker, sending a flicker of flames through his veins. Heat radiates off their bodies.

"You haven't shaved in a while," he murmurs.

"Neither have you." His breath smells like chamomile. "Should I?"

George shakes his head, the hint of a smile ghosting over his lips. "I like it. It's rough."

You like it rough? Dream swallows the questions. The wildfire spreads from his face to his chest.

Just a few inches they'd be pressed against each other, no space between them. He runs his thumb just under George's bottom lip, staring at his mouth before looking back up to meet his friend's gaze, who looks away instantly. A deep blush crawls from his cheeks to his ears, his eyes flickering side to side.

Sapnap's words echo in his mind. *Do you know what you want?*

No. Not yet.

With a strike of lightning, he jumps back. George loses his balance, looking shocked at the sudden lack of connection. Any blaze is stomped out as Dream steals back the reins from his heart. They stare at each other, Dream's heart jack hammering away at his ribcage. He plucks the phone out of George's hand before he does something he'll regret.

He shouts in victory before the moment can properly sink in, throwing his hands up. The blood rush in his ears nearly drowns out George's protests.

"You're such a tease, Clay." His voice wavers.

"Uh oh, pulling out the first name." Dream turns the flashlight off before tossing it back. "Come on, let's find Bad and Sapnap."

He starts to walk, panic quickening his stride. George jogs to catch up. Neither know where they're going, but eventually, they end up in the lobby again. The receptionist holds an electronic lantern that lights up the room well enough for them to find their friends.

"Dream! George!" Sapnap waves his arms at them. "Where the hell did you guys go?"

"Yeah, we were worried," Bad says.

George stuffs his phone into the pocket of his hoodie. "Sorry, we got lost."

"Yeah, sure. Lost."

Dream shoots a glare at the youngest, who raises his hands innocently.

"The tour's off, we might as well go back to the hotel," Sapnap explains.

“Aw, man,” George whines. “I wanted to buy something from the souvenir shop.”

“It’s still open. You can go on ahead, we’ll meet you outside.”

His face lights up and he rushes in a different direction. With the mood now back to normal, Dream exhales, rubbing his palms over his thighs. Bad gestures for them to follow him to the entrance.

“So, we’re kinda stuck,” he says. “Who knows how far the blackout reaches.”

“When will the power come back on?” Dream doesn’t pay attention to Bad’s reply.

He thinks about George’s reaction, leaning into his touch, blushing at the proximity, somehow entranced by him. His hand tingles from where he’d held him. Dream yearns to do so again, but not just his cheek. Maybe he could hold his hand, mess with his hair, touch his soft skin all over, even in parts his mind dares not to wander to.

When Bad pulls him out of his thoughts, they’re outside, standing under a plastic canopy set up on the sidewalk. Muffled thunder rumbles through the air. He tucks his hand under his arms, shivering as the cold wind cuts through the layers of his clothes.

“What do you think, Dream? Dream? Hello?”

A hand waves in front of him. Dream slowly blinks. “Sorry, I zoned out.”

Sapnap smirks. “Bad found a restaurant that does take out. Wanna go there?”

“Oh. Yeah, sure.”

Bad raises a brow, glancing between Dream and Sapnap before looking towards the doors. George joins them outside, carrying a small plastic bag.

“Where are we going?” He asks.

“Finally, someone who wants to listen to me.”

As Bad explains to George their plan for food, they begin to walk, running between buildings to take cover under balcony after balcony. Water sloshes into the sidewalk, soaking through his shoes into his socks. Sapnap complains about not being able to spend more time in the museum, though he was able to get a refund for the tickets. George gives short, mild responses.

They all order an early dinner (Sapnap insists on paying for their meals) and head back to the hotel. Luckily, George brought his laptop with him, so they crowd his and Dream’s hotel room to eat and binge watch movies. Bad and Sapnap sit in the middle of their king sized bed. George watches from the corner of the bed, sitting across the room from Dream, who munches silently through his chicken tenders.

He wonders if he’d gone too far. The last thing he wants is to destroy their friendship because he can’t think before he acts.

As the first movie ends, Sapnap switches it to a scary one that he doesn’t recognize. Dream tunes back into reality just in time to see George leaving the room. He watches him, then looks at his other friends in confusion.

“He’s going to get us more drinks from the convenience store,” Bad explains.

“Oh.”

Sapnap pauses the movie. “Did something happen between you two? I don’t think you guys have ever been this quiet before.”

“I, uh...” Dream waves his fork in the air like a magic wand. “I almost kissed him.”

Bad chokes on his fries. “You *what*?”

“What do you mean *almost*? You chickened out?” Sapnap gasps.

“Look, it all happened so fast, okay? One minute I was stuck in a pitch black bathroom, and the next I’m standing over George, two inches from making out with him in a fucking bone room.”

Bad squawks. “Language!”

Sapnap ignores him. “Bone room?” His laugh further fuels his humiliation.

“Bones, dinosaurs, whatever. My brain isn’t functioning.”

Dream sinks further into the couch, a flush of embarrassment warming his face. Bad smiles with the sympathy that Sapnap lacks.

“So?” He looks at Dream with an expectant look.

“Don’t make me say it.” Dream stabs into one of his chicken tenders. “Yeah, I... I like him. A lot. Jesus, that’s the first time I’ve said that.”

“Well, I’m proud of you, Clay. That couldn’t have been easy.” Bad sends him a smile that puts his mind at ease.

George walks back in, and Sapnap presses play. The rest of the night goes well, conversation slowly returning. Dream relaxes, dropping his empty takeout container into their trash can, and falling asleep with the background noise around him.

Tepid

Chapter Summary

CW: mild sexual content, implications of a boner (yes there's a warning for that)

Chapter Notes

goooooood morning!

When Dream wakes up, he finds himself facedown on the floor, George's duvet tangled around him. A thin layer of sweat clings to his body. He looks around in mild confusion, wincing at the dull pain that shoots up his neck. George lies face down into the bed, still sleeping and splayed out like a starfish.

He's surprised he was able to sleep the entire night. Usually, he was a light sleeper, any small noise or light would wake him up and once he's awake, it'd be nearly impossible to fall asleep after. The weeks long of deprivation must've finally caught up to him.

Despite his phone saying that it's one in the afternoon, the room's atmosphere looks like the middle of the night. He tries the room lights, which don't turn on, then bedside lamp. The TV stays dark even as he smashes the on button. Another blackout. Great.

Dream manages to his feet and slips into the shower. As soon as the cold spray hits his skin, he cringes, expecting it to be hot. He grits his teeth and soaks himself in the freezing cold water before fumbling for his shampoo bottle. When his hand touches nothing but the plastic lining, Dream opens his eyes. The only thing in the shower is a small bar of hotel soap.

“Shit.” He forgot his shampoo in his suitcase. “George!”

A few moments later, his friend staggers into the bathroom, in his boxers and eyes still shut.

“W-what's going on?” He slurs, sounding drunk with sleep.

“Can you get my toiletry bag?”

George groans and turns back around, returning with the small black bag. “Why are you taking a cold shower?”

“There's no hot water,” Dream explains, grabbing the bag and pulling out what he needs. “So good luck when you take a shower.”

“First I'm stuck in a hotel with you of all people, and now I have to take a cold shower?”

Dream squeezes the shampoo onto his head and scrubs. “Wanna join? We can warm it up.”

“Shut up, Dream.”

He quickly finishes his shower, getting dressed in the thickest clothes he brought. George has burrowed his way back into the bed, now just a lump of blankets and pillows. The storm lets little light in. To brighten it as much as possible, Dream throws the curtains open, giving the room a grayscale aesthetic.

Even though the three layers he's wearing helps with the cold, Dream can't stop shivering, so he lifts up the duvet, crawling into the bed beside George.

"What are you doing?" It's warm inside his cocoon.

"I'm cold," he says. "That water was freezing."

George scowls at him, face lit by his phone. "Get your own bed."

Dream can't help but chuckle. "Why would I want to do that when I could share it with you?"

Pink tints his friend's cheeks, and he mumbles something about being a flirt before returning his attention to his phone. Dream pulls his phone out as well and scrolls through twitter, liking and reblogging a few tweets here and there.

Unfortunately, his phone hadn't charged at all overnight, leaving his battery to slowly dwindle down towards its death. It's already at 78 percent. Knowing it could be hours, even days, until the power to come back, he decides to save its charge.

Boredom seeps in after a few minutes of staring into the blanket's cozy darkness. His mind jumps from topic to topic. After the first verse of the elevator song repeats over and over in his brain, he decides that he's not satisfied just lying around. He rolls over onto George, who grumbles in discontent.

"George." He draws the name out, head resting on the center of his back. "I'm bored."

"Too bad." George shoves him off.

"Let's go do something."

"Like what? There's nothing to do."

Trying to reclaim his spot on top of George, Dream ends up slipping off the bed. "Let's go walk around. There's a bunch of cool stuff to see, and we should probably save our battery."

"That sounds boring."

Even though he complains about the idea, George follows him out of the blanket mound. They slip on their shoes and leave the room. Dream doesn't know what time it is, but it's either early or late enough that most of the hotel is devoid of other tourists. The breakfast buffet in the lobby is still open. With nothing else to do, they grab plastic plates and grab their fill of food.

Dream realizes just how hungry he is and plows through his stack of tasteless waffles, drowning them in syrup as he does so. He takes a long swig of his orange juice, seeing George watching him from across the cramped table. His eyes flicker down to his plate.

"So, now that we're stuck," he begins, bringing a piece of bacon to his lips, "what're you planning to do with no power?"

"Not sure yet." Dream swallows his mouthful of brunch.

George licks his lips, still avoiding eye contact. “Yet you dragged me out of our room.”

“Oh, come on now, if it was up to you, we’d never leave.”

“It’s better than having no plan.”

He rolls his eyes, head tilting towards the lobby doors. Outside, the rain rages against the asphalt, shimmering sheets of static obscuring his view of the street. Dream doubts any businesses are open, especially with the flood warnings still prevalent, though the thunder has subsided throughout the night.

“How about...” he clicks his tongue. “We just wander around and try to find something to do?”

George laughs until he looks back at Dream. “Oh, you’re being serious?”

“Yeah, why not? I walked around the hotel the other night, and it’s a lot bigger than it looks.”

With their food now finished, Dream picks up their plates and tosses them in the nearest trash can. George follows him as he begins to wander the right hallway. They walk with their steps in time. Dream leads him to the pool and gym first, lighting their way with his phone.

George presses his face against the small window in the pool doors. “I can’t see anything.”

“Oh, right.” Dream squeezes himself beside his friend, holding his light to the glass. “What about now?”

“Woah. Is that a jacuzzi?”

A thin layer of mist hovers over the pool. Dream tries the door handle. Surprisingly, it opens, and a lightbulb pops into his mind. He giggles as he sneakily enters the pool area.

“What’re you doing?” George asks in exasperation.

“Finding something to do.” Dream shoots him a thin grin and drops his phone onto one of the open chairs.

The chilly air sends goosebumps up his body as he pulls off the first few layers of shirts and he doubts the water will be any warmer. He glances over his shoulder. George watches him with an amused smile, foot holding the door open.

“Care to join me?”

“You know that water must be freezing,” George laughs. “I don’t feel like getting pneumonia.”

Dream kicks his pants off and takes off his final shirt, throwing them on the chair. He edges towards the pool edge, dipping his toes to test the water. Ripples run over the surface. When his foot dips into warmth, Dream pauses, confused. He sits and dunks his legs up to his knee.

“What the...”

“Is it too cold?” George calls teasingly.

“No, it’s warm.” Dream looks behind him. “Come on, touch it.”

George shakes his head, arms crossed over his chest. “I’m not that dumb, Dream. You’re just going to push me into the water, which is going to be freezing.”

“No, seriously, look!”

While keeping George’s gaze on him, Dream lets himself fall into the pool. The tepid chlorine water greets him with ease. He pushes his head out of the water again, grinning at George’s astonished open mouth.

“Will you come in now?”

After a moment, George nods, letting the door close behind him. He slowly approaches the pool, shimmying out of his wrinkled jeans. With their phones lighting up the large space and his clothes discarded, George swings his legs into the water, eyes widening.

“You weren’t kidding.” He lifts himself up by his arms and sinks in, sighing in contentment.

“Would I ever lie to you? Come on, let’s race.” Dream smiles to himself and plunges underwater, swimming to the opposite end of the pool.

From the sound of the muffled splashing behind him, he knows George is chasing him. Pride blooms in his chest. He kicks harder, spinning around and swimming towards the other end. Halfway across the pool, Dream pokes his head out to catch some air before submerging his head back under and propelling himself further.

He stretches a hand out in front of him to touch the end. Dream resurfaces for the final time as he reaches the wall, breathing heavily. George, who has his eyes squeezed closed under the water, runs headfirst into the wall. Water cascades off him.

George stands up, rubbing his head. “Ow.”

“Are you okay?” Dream raises a hand to take a look.

His fingers run through George’s wet hair, searching for any sign of injury. George freezes under his touch. Dream thinks he stopped breathing. After finding no blood or a bump, he thinks for a moment. The only way to find out what he wants is to act on his feelings.

“Your hair is so soft,” he murmurs.

He gently brushes George’s hair to the side, just the way he likes. George looks on the verge of exploding. The crimson blush reaches from ear to ear, and he stares up at Dream with wide, dark eyes, mouth squeezed shut. When their eyes meet, his knees go weak, joints turning into jello.

Under his touch, George’s skin is cool and sprinkled with freckles of water, droplets running down his shoulders and over the smooth canvas of his chest. Dream braves to move his fingers down, grazing the back of his hand over George’s cheek. A tremble runs through his body, making Dream shiver in return.

“Y-yours is softer,” George stammers. He raises a hand, carding his fingers through his hair. Dream sighs softly.

Moments like this makes him forget how lonely he was at home, with nobody to talk to or see without using his computer screen. They’re suspended in, Dream’s hand resting against George’s cheeks and George’s fingers scraping the nape of his neck.

“And it’s long, too.”

Dream forces down an inappropriate joke. “Should I cut it?”

George shakes his head. His eyes wander away from Dream's, running over his face and further down. Dream wonders if he feels the same tugging in the pit of his loins, a string pulling them into each other and tying them together.

“Can I...” George licks his lips, “Can I hug you?”

The last word barely leaves his lips before Dream wraps his arms around his center, pulling George into him. The water ripples from the sudden movement. George freezes, inhaling sharply, before his hands slide around Dream's abdomen. Dream props his chin on George's head, bringing an arm to cradle the back of his head.

Heat radiates from their bodies, mixing together and consuming the cold until every inch of Dream's body is on fire. He's never been so warm before. It feels like he swallowed the sun, burning him from the inside out.

“I feel so safe.” George laughs at himself. “That sounds so silly.”

“It's not silly,” Dream reassures him.

He pulls away enough to catch George's jaw in his hand. The temptation to kiss him grows with each second that passes. Their bodies are flushed. Dream corrals his wandering thoughts, focusing on any other sensation other than George's soft skin pressed to his own. The few inches of height Dream has on George allows him to tower over him. It would take only a tilt of George's chin and a dip of his head to catch his friend's lips in his own.

Friend. The words leave a sour taste in the back of his throat. He doesn't know why he wants that title to change in his mind, but he does, though he can't even think the word. That damned song plays in his head.

*Help me darling, now I'm feeling lonely
Help me darling, now I feel afraid*

George's eyelids flutter, words forming on his lips without noise. Dream smiles, amused.

“Use your words.” His voice comes out deep, thunder rumbling from his throat.

George blinks, eyes widening as if he just now realizes the position they're in, and shoves Dream away. In the

“I'm sorry.”

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No, it's not you- well, it is you but it's- I can't say it.” George grips a fistful of his hairs.

He spins a few times before facing Dream once again. The color has left his face, pupils still blown, and his breath coming out in quick, heavy waves.

“George, breathe. What's going on?”

“I- I need to leave.”

Dream does a quick once over, trying to find something that could've caused the sudden panic in his friend before he glances down.

“Oh.” His stomach stirs. “ *Oh.*”

George is out of the pool before he can even understand what he saw.

Dream can't let the situation sink in. It doesn't make sense. He always had a suspicion that maybe, *maybe*, George shared his feelings. As extroverted as he is, George never let anyone get close enough to even know how to decipher him. If there's anyone who can tell, it's Dream, but now, with his head spinning on a swivel, trying to put pieces of the past few days together to get the clearer picture, he doesn't know what the *fuck* was happening.

He scrambles out of the pool as George shouts a swear. Dream fumbles as he puts on his clothes, not bothering to dry himself off. George is wrestling with the door, tugging at the handles while muttering obscenities.

"The bloody door is locked," he grumbles.

"Let's try the other ones." Dream points to the other end at another set of double doors. "They might be unlocked."

George turns, avoiding looking in his direction at all, and speeds towards the opposite side of the room. Dream follows, picking their phones up as they pass the chair.

They try the doors. No luck. Dream squints through the windows. It's too dark on the other side to see where it leads and if there's someone to help them.

"Shit."

"Call Bad or something," George says.

He falls into a chair. Dream does what he says, taking a seat beside him.

It goes straight to voicemail. His phone must've died, which surprises Dream. Bad is the most responsible out of the four. He tries to call Sapnap, but gets the same result.

"I think their phones are dead. Great." Dream huffs and clicks his phone off. "We're stuck. Guess we should've stayed in our room, huh?"

George doesn't respond. He's staring holes into the slippery tiles under their feet, his leg bouncing. Dream rests his hand on his knee.

"Hey, it's okay." He doesn't know if he's comforting him because they're stuck or because of his... situation. "Don't worry about it."

"I don't want the rest of the trip to be weird," George softly responds.

Dream knows the answer, but asks anyway. "Why would it be?"

"Don't make me say it."

"What, that I turned you on?"

George huffs like he's been punched in the gut.

"Was it my voice?"

"I don't know, maybe." George looks pitiful. "I'm sorry, I don't want this to mess up our relationship."

“Don’t worry about it. It’s kind of a compliment, being able to get you all riled up.” Dream winks at him, patting his knee.

He earns an eye roll, which prompts him to continue. “Has this ever happened when we were on call?”

“... A few times,” George confesses. “Your voice is just nice, okay?”

“Have you ever-” Dream stops himself. “Nope, nevermind, that’s too far.”

A suffocating silence blankets them. Dream didn’t mean to make the moment weird, but he doesn’t know how to resolve it. Only time could untangle this cluster fuck.

Privacy

Chapter Summary

TW: wet dreams, masturbation, mild sexual content

After god knows how long, waiting and avoiding looking each other's way, the pool door creaks open. Dream, who's burned through half of his phone battery in an attempt to avoid the tension, jumps to his feet. A confused hotel employee stares at them with bewilderment written over his bored expression, a flashlight and mop bucket in hand.

He glances at Dream, then to George, then back. Finally, he sighs the way employees do when they find customers doing something against the rules.

“You know you guys aren’t supposed to be in here,” the employee says.

“Oh, thank god,” George groans. “We got locked in.”

“Yeah, I see that, but hotel guests aren’t allowed in here because of the virus.”

Dream smiles apologetically. “Sorry about that, we’ll be on our way.”

“You guys didn’t get in, did you?”

The two men exchange nervous glances.

Luckily, the employee just shrugs and pushes the door wider. “Whatever. Next time you hook up in an off limits area, maybe leave the door open so you don’t get trapped.”

They immediately start breaking out half-baked justifications.

“We weren’t-”

“All we did was swim-”

“No way in hell I’d do that in public-”

“We’re straight, we swear-”

“Hey, don’t worry about it.” The employee gestures for them to leave. “They don’t pay me enough to care.”

Dream silently rushes out of the door, George sputtering out streams of excuses as he follows him closely behind. They basically run down the halls. Once they’re far enough, Dream stops, his body tired from jumping to anxiety to fear to absurdity.

They look at each other. Simultaneously, they explode into laughter, the ludicrous events finally catching up to them. Dream doubles over, his airy wheeze evolving into high pitched giggling, and nearly tips over from the momentum.

“Oh, my god!” George shrieks, cackling loud enough to make any of the stray folks around them

stare. "He thought- he thought we-"

"Fucked in a pool!" Dream collapses to the floor, near hysterics.

"Oh my god, twitter's going to have a field day with this!"

He throws his head back, hitting the wall, and laughs even louder. George sinks to his knees beside him, laughter dying quickly. Their breathing steadies out as their eyes meet, and the memory of what he saw rushes forward with force. Dream looks away first.

A small laughing fit can't erase the nervous tension between them. It was embarrassing for the both of them. They're close, but not sharing what gets them off close. Dream knows how guilty George must feel, he would be too in his position, even if there's nothing to be guilty about.

"We can drop it," he offers. "It's not that big of a deal."

George chews on his top lip. "It's not? I thought you'd be grossed out or something."

"I mean, I didn't expect it, but-"

"But what?"

The two stare at each other. Dream glances down to George's mouth, wondering what would've happened if he hadn't been pushed away. Would he have kissed him? Would things have evolved from then? Would they have-

Dream shakes his head, pressing his legs together. "I think the cabin fever's getting to me."

"Me too."

He hadn't meant to get a reaction like that out of him. Dream never wants to make George feel pressured or ashamed with whatever happens between them. Despite how the situation raised more questions than it answered, he doesn't want to decipher his emotions and desires at the expense of his best friend's comfort or trust.

Ease up on the flirting, he chastises himself, or else next time it'll be you creaming your pants.

George offers an olive branch in the form of his outstretched hand. Dream takes it, being pulled to his feet. With a single look, he tries to tell George everything he wants to but can't. That he's sorry, he doesn't know what he's doing or what he wants, just that it involves him. But he can't guarantee that George knows, so he makes it a point to squeeze his hand. The smile Dream earns in response keeps him warm.

With their hands still tightly bound together, they hear someone call their names. George drops Dream's hand, who pretends not to be disappointed.

"Dream! George!" Sapnap skids to a stop in front of them. "We were looking everywhere for you. You weren't in your room and our phones are dead so we couldn't call you. Bad thought you died or something. Where were you guys?"

They exchange a look.

Do you want to tell him? George asks with a raise of his eyebrow and tilt of his chin.

Dream grins and shakes his head. *Not really. That will be just for us.*

“We went on a walk and got turned around,” he lies.

Sapnap doesn’t believe them, given he begins to question them further, but they just laugh and avoid answering. The three return to Bad’s room, where the oldest rummages through his suitcase for something.

“Oh! You found them!” He says cheerily.

“Found them making out in a hallway,” Sapnap says.

George squeals. Dream slugs Sapnap’s arm, being gentle of course, though he sticks his tongue out to him like a child.

“Were you? It’s about time, since you two-”

He doesn’t see George run past him, but in a blink, his hand is over Bad’s mouth, muffling the rest of his sentence. Dream raises a brow in confusion.

“Have you guys eaten yet?” George asks. “Because wow, look at the time, it’s nearly five in the aftern- wait, how long were we in there?”

Dream shrugs. “I dunno, I wasn’t paying attention to the time.”

I was too lost in you.

Bad surrenders, George letting him go, and offers to buy them dinner from DoorDash. Despite how clueless he can be, Bad knows when to stop pressing at an issue. Sapnap, on the other hand, is either too dense or doesn’t give a shit. It’s the latter, Dream knows it is. He just wishes that the atmosphere didn’t switch from calm to intense in the matter of seconds.

As they head back to Bad and Sapnap’s room to wait for their food, George slips to the back of their four person crowd. Dream stops himself from looking over his shoulder. Since the power’s still out, they climb the stairs.

A cold hand slips into Dream’s. He jumps at the touch, the only person behind him being George. He can’t figure him out. One moment, he’s pushing him away, the next he’s holding Dream’s hand in a pitch black staircase.

Then again, Dream has been playing the same game. Hopefully by the end of this week, he will have a straight answer, from himself and George.

Sapnap swipes his key and waits for the green light to appear on the lock. When it doesn’t, he swipes again. And again. He swipes it a fifth time when Dream realizes that it won’t open.

“Power,” is all he has to say to make them understand.

Sapnap hangs his head in shame. “Shit. What now?”

“First of all, language.” Bad points to the doorknob. “The doors still have regular locks, I’ll go talk to the receptionist to get keys. We can’t be the first ones to complain.”

“I’ll come with you,” George offers.

As fast as it comes, his hand leaves Dream’s leaving his skin prickling with cold. The two head back downstairs, leaving him and Sapnap alone in the dark hallway. Pulses of light come through the small windows at each end of the hall, and Dream sees Sapnap staring at him between flashes.

“What? Is there something on my face?”

“Did something happen?” Sapnap asks. “Again?”

Dream’s face grows hot with humiliation. “It’s that obvious, huh.”

“You’re not as good at hiding your feelings as you think. So, spill.”

After a beat of hesitation, he explains everything, excluding George’s tent, with his words coming out more and more choked. He doesn’t know why he’s getting so emotional over something so trivial. But the fear of ruining their friendship overwhelms him, and his hands shake as he speaks.

Sapnap listens without interrupting. His eyes focus only on Dream’s face, his brows knitting close together with confusion and frustration.

“This is getting ridiculous,” he says as soon as Dream’s finished. “Why don’t you guys just confess your undying love for each other and get this drama show over with?”

“What? He doesn’t-”

“He does. You’re just too stupid to see it.”

“Don’t get my hopes up,” Dream threatens mildly.

“I’m not blind, Dream.” Sapnap smacks Dream’s forehead. “Neither is Bad or Ant or anybody else on the SMP. He gushes over you when you’re not listening, gets flustered when you flirt with him, and he lets you touch him when he won’t let anyone else.”

A staring contest ensues. Dream wants to deny that he hasn’t noticed George’s reactions, especially him getting turned on by his voice. But the evidence keeps piling up, burying him alongside his own denial.

Time to start digging.

“I’m terrified,” Dream confesses. “I’m terrified that I’ll scare him off. He’s my best friend, Nick. If I screw this up, I’ll lose him forever, and that’s way more important to me than any stupid puppy dog crush.”

A sympathetic smile spreads across Sapnap’s face. “You won’t screw this up. And you won’t scare him any.”

Dream wishes that were true. “Don’t- don’t tell him that I like him, okay? I’m going to stop whatever the hell I’m doing, he’s obviously uncomfortable with it. And besides, nothing’s going to happen between us.”

“Is that what *you* want?” Sapnap asks. “Or is that what you think George wants?”

He doesn’t have an answer.

“George isn’t gay.”

“You don’t know that.”

“He said so before on stream,” Dream replies flatly.

“Things change. Don’t you see the way he looks at you?” Sapnap scoffs. “You’re the sun in his

eyes.”

His choice of words nearly sends him collapsing to the floor. “What?” The song repeats in his mind.

Well honey, I just wanna let the sun in

“I’m—”

“We’ve got the food!” Bad appears in the darkness, a pair of keys jingling in his hands. “Woah, Dream, you okay? You look like you saw a ghost.”

Dream swallows roughly, mouth having gone dry. “Any plans for the rest of the night?”

“How about another movie?” Sapnap suggests, shooting him a glance.

George stays quiet, looking like he’s gotten his ass chewed out by a parent, but nods.

“Alright, Bad, you’re choosing this time.”

They end up watching Detective Pikachu. While Bad and Sapnap sit on the floor, fighting for the cold popcorn bowl, Dream and George sit on the bed. Dream sits as far as he can on one end, George doing the same thing. Every few minutes, they would glance at each other, look away when the other noticed. The cycle repeats until Dream forces himself to enjoy the film.

The lights are off, as the power still hasn’t come back, but the computer screen sends an array of colors dancing across George’s pensive face. Dream doesn’t mean to stare, but god, he can’t get enough of him.

After a couple seconds, his eyes meet Dream’s, and they stay there. Like an impulse, George scoots towards the middle of the bed. With a relieved smile, Dream creeps closer. By the time the movie ends, they’re pressed together, George leaning his head on Dream’s shoulder.

The credits roll, and Dream, assuming he fell asleep, moves to wake George up. George is staring up at him, lips parted and pupils swallowing his irises. He jumps away, stretching as soon as he’s off the bed.

You’re the sun in his eyes.

Dream climbs off the bed, telling their friends goodnight. Bad and Sapnap cheerily reply with knowing grins. George flips them off.

“Sleep tight, Gogy,” Sapnap coos.

“Shut the fuck up, Snapmap.”

Their room is only a few doors down. George immediately falls into their own bed, limbs flailing as he strips down to his underwear. Dream takes off his jacket, getting ready to sleep on the couch again.

“What’re you doing?” George mumbles.

“Going to sleep,” Dream says. “Well, if I can even fall asleep tonight.”

He gets a glare that calls him stupid in twenty different languages. “Just sleep here.”

At first, Dream thinks he's kidding, until George flips over.

"But—"

"No, buts, except your ass in bed."

Dream bites the inside of his cheek to stop himself from laughing. "Okay, mom."

The bed is warm. George starts snoring almost immediately, and Dream stares up at the ceiling. Sleeping in the day before fuels him so he doesn't fall asleep. All he can do is break down the day, try to figure out where he went wrong, and how to proceed.

On one hand, if he keeps this dance going, George might get crushed in the process. But on the other hand, if he forces his emotions down again, it'll hurt him, and he'll regret it when he goes back home. Who knows when they'll see each other next. It could be weeks, months, years. They could go the rest of their lives never meeting again.

Frustrated, he groans aloud, scrubbing his face. If Sapnap isn't lying and George really likes him back, then Dream could wait for him to make the first move. Unfortunately, George never acts on his feelings, so he might need a push. And, at the end of everything, if nothing happens, Dream will get over it.

He can't sleep, a common occurrence, and helps time go faster by playing on his phone until it dies. When he returns to staring out the balcony door, counting the seconds between the thunder and lightning, George moves from beside him.

Facing him, he snakes an arm around Dream's stomach, knee thrown over his legs. A soft mutter of intelligible sounds escapes his lips, before he sighs and presses his sweaty forehead against Dream's shoulder. Dream holds his breath, body splayed out and frozen. George's fingers against his bare abdomen stimulate every nerve ending in his body, sparks of fire running to wake him up even more.

With a low rumble of thunder masking his sound, he exhales, trying to keep his chest unmoving so as to not disturb his friend. The knee over his thighs rises, dangerously close to his crotch. George mumbles again, still unintelligible, but Dream's brain tricks him into thinking it's his name. He slowly lifts his arms, getting ready to lift George's cement limbs off of him. When he starts to maneuver his legs from under George's, he's pulled even closer.

Now, George is pressed snugly against Dream's side. He holds him in place. Dream doesn't know what's going on, never thinking of him as the cuddling type, until he feels George begin to move. Soft, slow movements, at first, hips rubbing against Dream's, nails digging into the hot flesh of his waist. Then, he moans under his breath. He barely hears it, but it's enough to set his body alight kindling in a fire pit.

Dream slaps a hand over his mouth to keep himself from gasping. What does he do? George will be mortified if he woke him, but if he didn't, it'd be like invading a private moment. And if Dream tries to move, he'll definitely wake him up.

His mind jumps through a multitude of solutions, trying to find the best one to remove himself from the situation before it continues. Meanwhile, he feels George against his thigh, hard and rutting erratically. Blood rushes from his face downward. Dream needs something to purchase himself. He fumbles to grab the pillows under his head, forcing himself to lie completely still.

This isn't happening, he tells himself. This has to be another one of my nightmares. There is no

way this is happening. It's like something out of a porno.

George retracts his hand from around Dream's waist, moving it to himself. Dream is unable to look away as he presses his palm against the hem of his boxers. The fabric strains against him, and Dream somehow pulls his eyes away from the sight and to the ceiling.

This is wrong. A violation of privacy. Of trust. He can't figure out a way out of this without either embarrassing George or embarrassing himself.

Dream continues to stare upwards, jaw clamped on his fist to avoid making noise. His body burns, the center of his gut aching. He ignores the boiling desire building there in favor. George's muffled whines ring its siren song in his mind, the soft thrusts against his thigh sending hot flames up his side with each brush of skin.

He's about to burn from the inside out. Only George could do this to him, rile him up to the point of combustion with barely a touch and a whimper. Dream manages to hold himself together by the thinnest of threads, frozen in a cocktail of fear and want. His blood burns as it travels under his skin.

The final straw comes as a clear moan escaping George's bitten, red lips.

"Clay."

Dream suddenly sits up, disregarding the potential threat of waking George up, and bolts to the bathroom. He locks the door with the deafening pulse of his heart in his ears. His legs squeeze together in a meek attempt to relieve pressure, trying to keep his breathing steady. From outside of the bathrooms Dream swears he hears George call out his name, and that gets a groan out of him. There's no way he'll be able to sleep now, or ever again.

It would be wrong to go through with the temptations. He should take a shower, cold thanks to the storm, and pretend that he didn't just watch George have a wet dream about him. But his name on George's lips crashes against his ears like thunder. Dream lets his hand drift lower, lower, lower, and nearly sobs from the faintest grip around himself.

With the taste of copper and shame on his tongue, he relinquishes control.

Plush Toys

Chapter Summary

happy holidays! thanks to everyone who comments and gives this story kudos, you're all amazing!!

Dream is still locked in the bathroom when George wakes up. How long he's been in there, he doesn't know, but long enough that faint light comes in front under the door. He doesn't want to leave the bathroom. All the things he wants to tell him are tangled in the mess he calls a brain, incoherent with a hint of ridiculous.

He hears his footsteps putter around the room, the sliding and shuffling of George going through his suitcase. The calling of his name goes unanswered. Delusional and sleep deprived, Dream doesn't move until he hears George move to the door. His body is numb, though the thought of George being right behind that door sends a chill up his back.

The knob jiggles. Dream bruises his biceps with the death grip he has on them.

“Hey, are you alright?” George asks. “Have you been in there all night?”

In response, Dream lifts a hand, blindly turning the shower on.

“Uh, okay. Can you hurry up? I really need to take a shower.”

His head swims with the implications. Dream pushes himself to his feet and showers, washing every inch of his still burning skin. He leaves pale scratches on the back of his neck, trying to remove the lingering feeling of George's hand in his hair.

When he turns the water off, he comes out shivering. That's his punishment: the cold aftermath of his actions. Of course, he didn't bring a clean set of clothes. Dream sucks in a breath, braving himself to unlock the door. George's head snaps in his direction as it creaks open. A sliver of stale blue light filters into the pitch black bathroom.

“I thought you were sick or something.” George grins, eyes dropping to the towel wrapped tightly around Dream's waist.

When Dream speaks, his voice is hoarse and groggy. “I forgot clothes.”

The smile on George's face falls. “If this is about what happened yesterday—“

“It's not.” He's so unconvincing that he doesn't even believe himself.

“Oh. Is there something else wrong then?”

He gestures to his suitcase. “Can you get me clothes?” Before he gets a reply, Dream closes the door returning his porcelain sanctuary to the darkness.

After a few seconds of shuffling, another knock comes. A pair of jeans stick out from under the door, along with underwear, socks and a sweater. Dream pulls them out, muttering a half hearted

thanks before dressing himself. The world tilts around him as he stands too fast, sending him back to the tiled floor. He groans.

“Fuck.” Dream grips his hair at the roots, tight enough to tear.

Too much has happened in the past three days. His mind can’t keep up with the emotional bounds he continues to leap and the whiplash George gives him. He’ll jump too far, reach too high, and come crashing back down to earth with nothing but his name and an empty heart.

Four days remain of their vacation turned isolation party. Returning home will be bittersweet.

An Airpod slides under the door. Dream stares at it, music humming through the tiny speaker, and doesn’t move to pick it up. George’s fingers poke through the bottom, wiggling around. He knocks it farther inside the bathroom. After another few seconds of dumb looks, Dream takes it and sticks it in his ear. The familiar melody restarts his freezer burned heart.

*Help me darling, now I'm feeling so lost
And help me darling, now I'm feeling shy*

Dream slumps back into the doorframe. George leans against the other side, giving him space while offering comfort, even without context of what’s bothering him. He presses at his eyes to force the tears down.

Why is George doing this? Dream thought he forgot about the song. Did he feel the same dopamine shot the moment the trumpets begin? Does his mind drift to the potential future, one where they’re unafraid and not thousands of miles apart, just an arm’s length away at all times?

*With you, I see the world completely different
With you, I need no place to hide*

The last thing he wants to do is face George. But Dream can’t just bury night deep beneath the rest of his repressed memories. The knowledge of the night’s events gnaws at his chest, and he knows it will only fester. He never was good at keeping secrets, especially from George.

*And some would like it best if they're headed for your chest
But I just wanna talk again tonight*

George speaks before Dream can finish collecting his thoughts. “Are you... okay?”

“No.”

“Do you wanna come out and talk about it?”

Dream’s hands slide down his face, callouses tugging at his skin. “I’m afraid.”

*And some would be okay just washing you away
But I don't wanna do that anymore*

“Can I come in?”

He waits, thinking, and unlocks the door. George slips inside, leaving it open behind him, and sits his phone down between them, the flash giving the space light. They sit a foot away from each other, within arm’s reach but far enough to not touch. Dream, with his back against the tub, and George in the middle of the bathroom.

“Do you remember what you dreamed about last night?” He asks.

Confusion crosses his face. “Yeah, why do you-” George’s eyes go wide, and his mouth drops open. His arms wrap around his midsection, skipping pale and going straight to green.

Dream nods softly, confirming the fear in his eyes.

“You-” He swallows, his Adam’s apple bobbing erratically. “You heard?”

“I didn’t want to wake you up and embarrass you.”

“Fuck, Clay, I’m so, so sorry, I didn’t-”

Hearing his name like that, rough and pleading, nearly makes Dream spiral again. “It’s not you- I’m the one who should be sorry.”

Desperation drives him forward, plowing into unfamiliar territory. Fear twitches at his fingertips.

“Why?”

Dream stabs his nails into his palm. “Because, I- I got off on it.”

The song fades to a stop and begins again.

“You- you jerked off to me?” George squeezes his eyes shut, shaking his head. “Having a wet dream about you? Wait, how did you even know it was about you?”

“You, uh, said my name.”

A shudder runs up Dream’s spine at the look George sends him.

Suddenly, he laughs. It’s not a funny laugh. It’s an unhinged and devastated cackle. Dream joins him with a short chuckle, confused.

“This is like my worst nightmare and best fantasy in one day.” George violently shakes his head.

“I know this is weird, but we can’t avoid it,” Dream says. “As much as I want to pretend it never happened, it did, and we won’t be able to move forward until we do.”

“What is there to talk about it? You turned me on, and me being turned on by you turned you on. Bloody hell, this is insane.”

“That’s not what I want to talk about.”

Outside, thunder hums its baritone song.

“George, you mean so much to me,” Dream begins, “and you always will.”

George looks back up with a stiff expression, barren of any emotion. It scares him.

“You’re my best friend, you helped me through the lowest parts of my career and helped me build it to where I am now. You introduced me to all of my closest friends. You gave me- you gave me another reason to live. Without you, I’d be a nobody, unfulfilled and lonely.”

A smile ghosts over George’s lips.

“But you’re... more than just my best friend now. You’re-”

“The sun. Like in the song.” George picks at the trim of his shirt. “*Let the sun in*, blah blah. So I’m like the sun.”

Dream reaches a hand out, cupping his jaw. “No, silly. You’re so much more than the sun. You’re the earth, the moon, the stars. You’re the hurricanes and sunny days, the ocean tides and volcano eruptions.”

“I’m... all of that to you?”

“You’re everything to me.” He pauses. “You destroy me and rebuild me all at once.”

*And now I know it’s real
Oh yes, I know it’s real*

They’re close enough that Dream can smell the sweat clinging to his clothes, see the wild flare of emotions in his eyes. Adoration. Fear.

*And now I know it’s love
Oh, it’s love, oh it’s love*

He inhales sharply, readying himself for the leap.

“I’ve made how I feel pretty clear.” Dream gently brushes his thumb over George’s cheekbone, proud at the sharp intake of air he retrieves. “Now, I need to know if you feel the same. No pressure, but I think I’ll combust without an answer. So, please. What am I to you?”

*Just let the sun in
It’s love, oh it’s love*

George looks at him for far too long. His lips open, shut, open, shut, open. “Clay, you’re-”

A flash so bright it overtakes the phone’s light interrupts them, immediately followed by a ground shaking roar. George jumps, hitting his head against the door knob. Dream lets go of him, planting a hand against the wall as the hotel trembles.

“What the hell was that?” Rapid knocking at the room door answers his question.

They look at each other, then to the door.

“Later,” George promises.

Dream nods. “Later.”

Sapnap and Bad stand at the door, looking scared out of their wits.

“Did you guys hear that?” Sapnap asks, holding his phone to his chest. “I think the hotel got struck by lightning.”

“Yeah, we heard it too.” Dream looks down the hall, seeing other patrons sticking their heads out of the doors in confusion.

Bad does the same, frowning. “Sorry to wake you guys, but we’ve got bad news. The storm’s a hurricane now. We won’t get hit head on, but given how bad it already is, we’re probably going to be stuck in here until our flights.”

Their flights are on Sunday. It’s Thursday.

George touches his cheek, where Dream's hand had been. "We'll find something to do."

"Yeah, like hang out with us instead of running off together." Sapnap grins. "They're powering some parts of the hotels with a backup generator."

"The arcade?" Dream perks up.

"You guys wanna go?" Bad gestures to the stairwell.

"Hell yeah," George responds, glancing at Dream. "You guys go ahead, though, I need to take a shower."

Sapnap shivers. "Good luck, dude, it's freezing."

"So I've heard."

The three leave George behind, heading to the first floor. They make it to the third floor before Sapnap breaks the silence.

"So, did you guys kiss yet?"

"No," Dream replies too quickly. He scratches his neck. "I'm working it out."

"What's to work out? You like him, he likes you, just fuck and live happily ever after."

Dream shoots him as deadly of a glare as he can. "I said I'm working it out."

Sapnap raises his arms. "Sorry. I'll drop it."

Bad smiles softly, patting Dream's shoulder. "Don't stress too much, Dream," he says. "You have time to figure it out. But I'd try to have some fun while we're still together, who knows the next time we'll have a chance like this."

"Yeah, hang out with us instead of running away with George to flirt with him." Sapnap elbows him.

"Thanks. You guys are the best."

They make their way to the ground floor, guided by the trail of candles and battery powered lamps. A few stragglers sit in the couches, either on computers or talking in hushed voices. Despite how violent the storm outside is, everyone still tries to keep the quiet.

The arcade is hard to miss without knowing what to look for. Luckily for them, Dream's a wanderer, and he leads them easily to the compact room. The sign at the entrance isn't on, and the inside is empty, which surprises them, but that means more options for the three to play.

Dream calls dibs on Mario Kart, determined to put himself in the leaderboard. Bad and Sapnap tag team in a Jurassic Park shooter game. When he wins a seventh time and finally makes it to fourth place, George shows up. He's bundled in a thick coat and, from Dream can see, at least two shirts and a green hoodie.

His hoodie.

"Is that Pac-Man?" George slides in front of the machine, funneling a few coins into the slot.

Sapnap manages to shove Dream off of Mario Kart. "Dude, you've been on this thing for twenty

minutes! Give us a turn!"

"Fine, fine!" Dream gets off the floor, eyeing a claw machine with Pokémons inside. "Hey, George, what's your favorite Pokémon?"

"Uh, don't have one."

He grins, sliding in two quarters. "You're about to."

The first two tries go poorly. Dream grapples hold of a Pikachu, but no, that's too basic for a gift, so he aims for the Applin in the far left corner, slightly buried beneath a Leafeon and white Vulpix. Despite his less than stellar knowledge of Pokémons, his sister's been teaching him, and he really likes the idea of a living apple.

Just his luck, he wins the two plushies he was aiming just to move. After a few dollars down the drain and some window smacking later, the three prongs dig into the red fluff. His final prize drops into the chute.

"Yes!" Dream pulls all four plushes and holds them in his arms triumphantly. "Guys, look!"

"How did you get four?" Bad exclaims.

"I'm just that good. You want one?"

He chooses the Vulpix. Sapnap snatches up the Leafeon, stuffing into the front of his jacket. Dream sticks the Pikachu under his arm and holds the Applin out to George.

"Tada," he says.

George stares it at. "It's an apple."

"*Applin*. It's a Pokémon, see?" Dream points to the two small leaves on its head and the worm sticking out from the side.

"Oh. It's cute." He sounds confused but content. George takes the plush toy and continues to stare at it. "I don't know much about Pokémons, but I like it."

From the rock band set up in the back of the arcade, Sapnap makes kissy faces. Bad giggles, deadpanning when Dream sends weaponized glares his way. George puts his new plush into the big pockets of his coat and holds a handful of coins out.

"Wanna play a round?" He nods his head towards the Jurassic Park machine.

Dream agrees with a murmur and follows him to sit.

The speakers planted into their seats vibrate with the roars of the velociraptors, the screen demanding quarters to begin the game. Inside of the machine feels like a small world, shut off from the storm. George puts the coins in, handing Dream one of the plastic guns, and chooses the first level. As the game cycles through the first bit of dialogue, Dream's eyes drift from the animated characters telling them about loose dinosaurs, landing on his friend.

He doesn't mean to stare. But every time he even glances towards George, his brain locks onto the features of his face. The divots in his cheeks when his smile gets too big. His tongue sticking out between his teeth. Dark, pinprick eyes flickering to Dream's face.

Dream straightens and points his gun at the screen. It's not the time to worry about their

relationship, or where it could go. Right now, all he needs to do is spend the time he has with his favorite people in the world and shoot as many dinosaurs as he can.

So, that's exactly what he does.

You're It

Chapter Summary

chicken nuggets and children games

Chapter Notes

every time heat waves updates my heart stops!
if you haven't read the newest chapter go read it!!
also, comment any fics for me to read!!! I wanna read more!

By the time they run out of change to use on the games, Dream's insides have started to digest itself. He doesn't remember the last time he ate, and as soon as George hears his stomach growl, he starts to berate him for not eating. That is, until his own stomach responds.

"Did you not eat this morning?" Bad scolds as they exit the arcade.

Dream and George glance at each other, which is an answer in and of itself.

"I think there's a McDonalds down the street." Sapn`ap runs ahead of them. "Let's go get some Happy Meals!"

George chuckles. "Isn't there a hurricane?"

"But chicken nuggets."

"I'm willing to go on a journey through the storm for McDonalds," Dream says.

The four argue back and forth. Bad and George say that it's a bad idea to leave the hotel given how bad the storm's evolved, but Dream and Sapnap tag team to convince them.

Dream doesn't know why he wants to go to the fast food place. Maybe he needs some time away from George, time away from the thoughts that always end up back to him. Shitty nuggets and fries might do the trick to distract his mind long enough for George to answer his unfinished question. His intentions are never clear, not even to himself.

Eventually, the older two give into their pleading. After collecting their raincoats, umbrellas, and concerned warnings from the attendees behind the front desk, they head into the storm. Dream walks ahead with Bad, pulling his phone out every few minutes like it will magically turn on despite having not been charged since they arrived.

Bad seems to notice and bumps shoulders.

"Do you wanna talk about it now?" He asks, the heavy pittering of rain coating their conversation from unwanted ears.

“Maybe,” Dream responds. “I’m still waiting.”

“For what?”

He forces his eyes to stay ahead of them. “I told George how I felt, and asked him if he felt the same way, but he hasn’t responded. I want to give him time, but there’s only a few days left on this trip, and if I leave before I get an answer-”

“Don’t be so impatient.” Bad’s parental voice makes him smile. “You already know he likes you, why are you waiting?”

“I need to hear it from him. Because what if they’ve changed since then? What if those tiny bits of crush he had left, like I thought they did for me?”

The giant yellow M comes into view as they turn right on the crosswalk.

“Proximity can rekindle emotions that have been snuffed out.” Bad scratches at his scalp. “Try not to hyperfixate on him returning your feelings, though. I hate to say this, but... there’s always a chance your fear might be right.”

Dream stomps on a puddle. “I’m fully prepared to be rejected. But I can’t get a yes or no when he keeps dodging.”

“Give him time. I’ve got a feeling everything will be okay.”

Inside the restaurant is empty besides the employees. The only lights on are behind the counter, steam billowing from the stoves. Bad shakes out his coat. Dream approaches the cashier with Sapnap, getting ready to order.

“You guys do know there’s a hurricane,” the young woman says flatly.

“I like to live life on the edge,” Sapnap responds, pulling out his wallet.

As he recites their order to the cashier, Dream looks over his shoulder, seeing George and Bad whispering to each other. Bad has that same fatherly smile, the one he only uses during hard conversations.

Curiosity blooms in his chest, but he quickly stamps it down when they look in his direction. He knows they’re talking about him.

Outside, wind whistles an ominous tune as it picks up pace. Dream’s socks are wet. He wonders how long their food will take to make.

George appears in his periphery, making him unintentionally glance over. Dream curses to himself. He trains his eyes on the employee filling up their sodas in the back, Sapnap chatting up the cashier as they wait.

Let the sun in replays start to finish in his brain. He mouths the lyrics, looking for a hidden message between syllables, and tries to recreate the trumpet part from memory. Dream could listen to that song a thousand times, and he’d find something new in it to fixate on.

The dominos have been set. George has all the power now, whatever he says determines whether they keep adding pieces, or topple completely.

Bad plops his chin on Dream’s shoulder, being barely tall enough to do so, and sticks his tongue

out as they all watch their food with impatient gazes. Sapnap's happy meal appears, followed shortly by the rest of their meals.

His friends are the only reasons he hasn't lost his sanity left. Without Bad or Sapnap, even George, Dream would probably have no friends, no life, no reasons.

Something grazes his shoulder, and Dream looks up, finding them standing at the crosswalk. Sharp raindrops prick his face. He raises an arm to rub his cheeks, George's hand slipping off his bicep. The light turns green for them, and they run across the street to their hotel, which comes into view through the rain.

Dream wonders if George was trying to hold his hand. He probably missed his opportunity by being an airhead and not getting himself out of his own head.

The transition from growling rain to the near silent lobby drags him out of his thoughts. Again.

Bad turns to them to collect their umbrellas, his wet hair sticking up in messy spikes. Sapnap is already digging into his fries. George stares at Dream, halfway through his sentence when he tunes back into reality.

“- delayed, so we might as well. Dream, do you think that's a good idea?”

He blinks. “What?”.

Sapnap snorts, sipping at his sprite. “Did you not hear anything we were saying?”

“Sorry. Got a lot in the noggin right now.”

“Our flights were delayed,” Bad explains. “We were thinking to either cancel them to stay a little longer or keep them and just extend our stay in the hotel. We'd all have to chip in if we did that, though.”

“Uh, yeah, I'm fine with whatever.” Dream forces the excitement out of his voice.

Just what he needs. More time.

The conversation turns to static around him, and he starts to eat his chicken tenders. When he returns back to reality, they've somehow ended up in his and George's room. Bad is retelling a story of some kind, sitting cross legged on the bed. Dream sits on the couch with George and Sapnap, the youngest being between them.

He runs out of fries.

“You know what we should do?” Sapnap slaps his knees. “Hide and seek.”

“What're you, six?” Dream snorts.

Bad's eyes light up with excitement. “Wait, that actually sounds like fun! We've got plenty of space to play.”

“I'm down,” George says.

“Majority vote! Who wants to be first?”

After a few rounds of rock, paper scissors, Sapnap is announced the seeker, and counts down from thirty as the other three take off in opposite directions.

Dream rushes to the right, knowing there's another staircase leading to the back of the hotel. He lets the door slam closed behind him. The shadows chase him as he trots down to the second floor, sprinting past a cleaning lady with an apology yelled over his shoulder. As he looks, he doesn't see George, but he continues to run.

He slips into a small room with a vending machine, squeezing his large frame into the space between the ice machine and the wall. At the sound of the stairwell door opening, Dream slapped a hand over his mouth. Although his breathing has evened out, his heart thrums with the anticipation of the oncoming chase.

Sapnap crosses in front of the vending machine, unaware of how close he is to finding the hidden man. Dream silently scoots backward. His chest screams in protest as he holds his breath, turning into a statue as his friend approaches. The dark acts as cover for him. He cowers each time the storm lights the small room, counting the seconds passing by.

Dream shimmies further behind the ice machine as Sapnap closes in, getting crushed against the wall, and prays. Sapnap giggles like a serial killer. With the light purged from his view now, his approaching demise without him even knowing. A shout in triumph alerts Dream of victory as Sapnap's hand smacks against his face.

"Ow!" Dream wriggles free of his hiding spot, rubbing his cheek. "You hit me!"

"I win! Yes!"

"That's so lame, we just started."

"What do you mean, I've been looking for you for like, twenty minutes." Sapnap's silhouette points down the hall, and they start heading back downstairs. "I found George almost immediately, and Bad was hiding in our room."

Dream shakes his head, laughing. "Dude, I was standing here for, tops, five minutes."

"Dude, no! Why are you so good at everything?"

George and Bad are waiting for them in the lobby, their laughs audible from the back stairwell.

"Again!" Sapnap cheers, like a child watching a movie. "George, you're the seeker now!"

"Aw, why?" George groans in faux annoyance.

"Because you were found first," Bad says.

Dream pats his shoulder. "Come on, be a good sport."

With another pout, and a nod, George gives in. "Fine. Just because that was kinda fun."

"Yes!"

The hiders scatter again.

This time, Dream heads for the restaurant. He knows George will never look for them on that side of the hotel. Given that it's still closed, there's a chance nobody will bother him. The bare is unattended, so he slides underneath it. A bottle of rum tips over from the small rack beside him, and he somehow catches it before it falls out of the display.

After a few minutes of waiting, he hears someone speaking above him. The bar's wood muffles the

words, but he recognizes it as George. He knows that voice. As he gets closer, his speech becomes clearer, and Dream bites his bottom lip to stop himself from giggling.

“Oh, Bad, oh Dream,” George sings, lengthening the vowels of their name. “I know one of you has to be here.”

Dream shrinks into himself. Unfortunately, when he shifts, he bumps back into the same case, the bottles clinking and one falling. Again. He impulsively shoots an arm out. The bottle lands safely in his hand, but another hand that’s not his plops on the top of his head.

“Shit.”

“Got you!” George runs around the bar ruffling Dream’s hair in celebration.

“Aw, come on!” Dream puts the bottles back before standing up. “I didn’t think you’d look for me here.”

“This is exactly somewhere you’d hide! It’s somewhere you’re not even allowed to be, hidden really well, and you’re super quiet for a tall dude. I just got lucky.”

He pouts at George. “Am I the first one you found?”

“No, I found Sapnap still looking for a hiding spot, and Bad was trying to hide behind a couch.”

“Should Bad be it this time?”

They both grin.

As the four regather, Sapnap changes the game.

“Tag.” He pauses for dramatic effect. “Who wants to be it.”

Bad and Dream look at each other.

Dream holds a hand out. “Rock, paper scissors?”

George groans and shoves him out of their small circle. “Just be it, Dream.”

“Fine, fine! I’ll count to ten. One-”

“Woah, woah woah, wait a minute!” Sapnap shouts.

“Two-”

“Dream, really?” George rolls his eyes.

Being the only smart one, Bad’s already running.

“Three-”

Now, the other two are gone. By the time Dream gets to ten, George is the closest to him, so he zeroes in on him. He sprints down the left hallway, losing and catching sight of his friend as they turn a corner.

The hotel staff stare at them in confusion as they zoom past, Dream slowly gaining ground on George. He reaches a hand out, just about to catch him, when George suddenly stops, ducking

from his grasp, and runs under his arms, headed back the way they came.

Surprised, Dream screeches to a halt, slamming his face into the wall before running after him once again, laughing as he tries to get his lead back. As he makes it back to the lobby, he sees a head of light brown hair poking out from behind the service counter. From the flustered look on the woman's face, Sapnap has to be there.

Dream grins, gaining a new target. He slowly approaches the desk, watching his friend, who doesn't seem to realize he can see him, shift nervously. When he gets close enough to tag him, Dream crouches, and Sapnap barely gets to his feet before a hand knocks him back down.

"Tag, you're it!"

With that, he turns tail and takes off.

He goes up the stairs, getting up to the eighth floor before a cramp starts in his calves. His legs carry him as far as they can across the grossly colored carpet. Dream reaches a dead end, jamming his shoulder into the wall as he fails to stop in time. Lungs welcome in chilled air.

A few beats of waiting later, Dream relaxes, shaking out his legs. It's been a while since he's had an adrenaline rush like this. Not one created from anxiety, arousal, or fear. Dream is a child again. He's chasing his sister through their childhood home. He's at recess with his classmates. He's not twenty one, he's twelve. And he has the best friends in the world with him.

By the time he notices Bad sneaking up on him, it's too late, Bad slaps his back, flying through the stairwell doors.

"Tag, you're it!"

"Mother f- Bad!"

Dream tries to follow him, legs still hurting, but gives up after the first few flights of stairs. He slows down leaning on the railings while wheezing his life away.

"Time out, guys!" He shouts, still hearing Bad running down. "My legs hurt!"

"Like I'm gonna fall for that!" Bad replies with a grin in his voice.

By the time he makes it to the ground floor, Bad's gone, and Dream can't find any of them. He pauses in the lobby, trying to get inside of his friend's heads.

Sapnap is reckless. He hides in plain sight, which is how Dream found him in the first place, but then he'll go out of his way and find a place on the farthest corners of the hotel.

Bad is either incredible at hiding or terrible, it's always a flip of the coin with him. It'll be the former now, considering he tagged Dream last.

George will be nearby. He likes to keep an eye out. Cautious and hidden, but still in view to make sure Dream doesn't get close enough to see.

Dream slowly sulks around, trying to avoid looking directly at certain corners of the room. A small thud and groan directs his attention to a coffee table surrounded by couches. George emerges from underneath, leaping over one of the couches and booking it towards the breakfast buffet station.

"Oh, no you don't!"

He somehow keeps up with George, hand ready to tag him when his foot hits the edge of the carpet. Gravity drags him down, and Dream attempts to catch himself, only for his elbows to give. His face slams into the cold floor.

“Ha, you can’t catch me- oh, shit, are you okay?”

George trots back to him. He kneels in front him, apologizing and holding a hand for him to grab. Dream looks up, face throbbing, and gently smacks his leg.

The look of confusion on George’s face will be a treasure for all time.

“You’re it.”

“Oh, my god,” George stands back up. “Help yourself.”

“Wait, no, George, come back!”

Labels

Chapter Summary

dream and george finally talk

Chapter Notes

happy New Years y'all! chapters might be slower after this one cuz I'm staring my next semester on Monday :3c college is gonna kick my ass but hopefully there won't be too big of a gap between updates.

George eventually comes back to help him, with the two getting chewed out by a manager to stop running around like kids of crack. They apologize, giggling as they hurry back to find their friends. When they do, Dream retells the events, and the four have a laughing fit that yet again alerts the staff of their disturbance.

By this time, night has fallen over the city, blanketing them back into near total darkness. Rain puttters gently against the balcony doors, the wind no longer audible through the thin walls.

“Guys, look, the storm’s letting up,” Sapnap points out when they settle back into Dream and George’s room.

Bad tries the lamp, which doesn’t turn on. “The power might come back tomorrow if it gets better, then we can keep exploring outside.”

“How long has the power been out?” Dream falls into the couch, looking at his dead phone’s screen. “I need to look at twitter.”

George giggles. “Everyone’s wondering where you guys are. I just keep tweeting random things.”

“Show me!”

He tilts his phone screen towards Dream. His battery’s at twelve percent.

whys america so cold

@dream haha your phone died

@dream, sapnap and badboyhalo: you guys suck as hide and seek

Underneath those three tweets, fans ask questions, along the lines of how their vacation’s going, if they got hit by the storm, and who’s rooming with who.

Dream giggles at a certain response.

i swear i saw you running in the rain to a mcdonalds in my city??? Was that you???

“Looks like there are fans around here,” he says.

Sapnap holds up his laptop with a frown. “It’s dead.”

“I’ll go get mine.” Bad gestures for him to follow. “George, come with?”

After a confused exchange of glances, he goes with Bad to their other hotel room. Sapnap glowers down at Dream.

“What did I do?” Dream asks.

“More like what haven’t you done. Do you know how frustrating it is to watch you guys flirting, touching, borderline eye fucking, and Bad and I are watching it like a soap opera, waiting for you guys to kiss already.” Sapnap swings his arms up. “What the hell are you waiting for?”

“I told you, confirmation.”

“What do you need confirmation for? He likes you, just kiss and be done with it.”

It’s not that simple.

Dream shakes his head. “I’m not doing this, we’ve had this conversation already.”

“You’re just stalling for time.”

“No, George is. I sat him down, told him how I felt, and asked how he felt. But we keep getting interrupted, and he pretends like these moments between us don’t happen whenever we have time alone.”

He stops, but Sapnap waits, hands splayed out like he’s searching for an answer. Dream inhales and taps his thighs.

“All I want-” he smacks his leg, “-All I *need* is for him to want this as much as I do.”

Sapnap’s frustrated face melts into pity. “I talked to him. He’s... well, you guys need to have a proper conversation. Because it’s really annoying watching you two dance around each other like moths on fire.”

Guilt pokes at his chest.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t realize-”

“It’s whatever. We just want you to be happy, and I know you’ll be happy together.”

Dream looks down, kicking his shoes off. “What if George doesn’t want that? What if he’s avoiding the topic just to spare my feelings?”

“Do you want me to talk to him?” Sapnap asks.

“No.” Dream doesn’t want to drag them down with him. “You’ve already done enough. Besides, no matter what happens, at the end of the week, I’m going home alone.”

“Maybe that’s why this is coming up now and not before. You gave yourself an escape plan.”

“How?”

His friend starfishes on their bed, making shapes with his hands. “Think about it. You had plenty of time to figure your emotions out during calls or when we played together. I know George had

already started feeling it back then. But you both repressed them, and they resurface now, when you have an out if things go sour. Whether or not you realize it, you chose the time where the final bow is inevitable. You go home with you guys, I dunno, dating, or you go home and never talk again. Either way, you go home.”

“I... I’m an idiot.”

“A little bit.”

“But I already did my confession. George is the one-”

“George is an idiot, too. But he’s different. You’re brutally honest, he’s a sugar coater.”

Dream massages his calves. “Do you think I... should’ve kept that to myself?”

“That’s not my decision to make,” Sapnap says. “And now, it’s not yours.”

The door opens, Bad holding his laptop and a small adapter with multiple ports.

“Guys, I had an idea!” He sets the computer in front of the TV. “We can all charge our phones using my computer.”

“Bad, you’re a genius!” Dream exclaims, leaping for his phone charger.

Once all four devices are plugged in, they set up another movie to watch, this time being some action movie Dream doesn’t catch the name of.

Sapnap catches his eye halfway through, and he sends him a small head tilt. Dream knows what he’s trying to say.

Don’t waste your chance.

Either way, you go home.

They all fall asleep in their movie spots, a grumbling snore coming from Bad’s curled up form on the couch. Sapnap takes up the entire bed, with George bundled up on the floor and sleep talking. While the others sleep, Dream sits on the ottoman, listening to music with his resurrected phone still plugged in.

A thin layer of clouds coat the skyline, letting strings of moonlight out of its fingertips. The barest shape of a crescent glows down on the city. Dream closes his eyes, letting himself be consumed by the soft bass line of a Peach Pit song. Deep growls of thunder sound deafening when the song pauses.

He wants to sleep, but his head is so crammed with thought it’ll take him all night to decode them. As patient as Dream wants to be, time is running out, even with the chance of their flights being delayed.

George doesn’t even look him in the eye when they’re around the others. Dream wonders if he’s ashamed of his feelings, if the reason for his delays isn’t disinterest but internalized homophobia. He always claims he’s straight when in front of a camera, but he acts so differently in person it gives Dream whiplash.

He’s just as loud, as easy to annoy, but he’s also... shy. Temperamental. Confident. And god, does

Dream love seeing this side of him.

However, it makes the whole straight claim seem less and less like an answer and more like a way to deter any shipping, although people will always do so. George might not actually be straight. Hell, Dream doesn't even have a label for his own sexuality. He just says he's "ambiguous" because he fears the consequences of his indecision.

But maybe he doesn't need one. Maybe the only label he needs is that he loves too deeply.

Labels are bullshit, he decides.

The song dissolves, Glass Animals replacing it.

Heat blasting from the air conditioner sprinkles sweat on the nape of his neck. Dream rubs it, remembering George's touch, and grips the overgrown hair there. He really needs to get a trim, another inch or two and he'd be able to put it in a bun.

He gives his hair a tug and lets go. Another song starts. Alec Benjamin.

Lightning strikes a building in the distance. A roll of thunder shakes the hotel. The dense raindrops pools in the streets, splitting and sloshing around the driving cars. All the building lights are off, letting sprinkles starlight shine down alongside the moon. If it wasn't for the clouds, Dream bets it would be a breathtaking view. He closes his eyes.

The conversation he's had with Sapnap and Bad filter into the forefront of his mind. He shouldn't drag them into his mess. This is his mess to make, and if it comes to it, to fix.

His eyes shoot open the moment he hears trumpets.

The Wallows. Let The Sun In.

He groans, scraping his nails through his growing beard. "Not this shit again?"

Dream stands to skip the song, getting a few steps before a head lifts up.

"Time?"

His heart leaps. Just like the first night there.

"Three thirty," he responds. "Go back to sleep."

George grumbles in disapproval. "You're awake."

"I don't sleep, remember?" That must be why Dream's making so many bad decisions.

"What's keeping you up?"

"Everything."

This seems to wake George up. He sits up on his knees, his blanket slipping off his shoulders, and blinks a few times.

"You wanna talk about it?"

Dream chuckles. "If you're willing to finally talk about it too."

“What’re you- oh.”

“Yeah.”

“It’s just... a lot.”

“I know.”

“Do you wanna... take a walk?”

“Please.”

They find themselves in the lobby. Cool air hisses through the vents, mixing in with the rhythmic rain. A hotel employee behind the front desk lies over its smooth surface, softly snoring.

His music continues to play, though it dissolves into the background sound when George sits on the white leather couch, patting the space beside him.

Dream chooses the chair across from him and nervously places his hands on his thighs, moving them up to grip his biceps. His knee bounces as they stare at each other.

Fear bites into his heart. He can’t stop moving.

George simply watches him, still and calm. He looks almost bored.

“So...” Dream drums his fingers against his shoulders.

“Funny, we only ever talk at the most inconvenient times,” George says.

“Yeah, I know. Sorry if I woke you.”

“It’s okay. I wanted to talk to you, actually.”

Blackbear plays in his ears. Dream pulls his airpod out, tugging it into its case.

“Is it about what I said?” He asks.

With a light-lipped smile, George nods. “I had... the biggest crush on you when we met. You were so suave, so nice, and your laugh just-” he makes swirly shapes with his hands. “I’d be an idiot not to fall for you.”

Dream continues to listen, hands shaking.

“But I don’t know what I feel outside of our moments. I can’t figure out if this is real or not.”

“You don’t know what I am?” His words will kill him if he keeps going.

“I know what you are. You’re my best friend.”

“But...?” Dream prompts.

“But I don’t know if I want to be more.”

His adrenaline rises and drops, a rollercoaster of anxiety fueling his actions. He looks down, nails cutting into his dry skin.

“I don’t mind trying to figure it out, though.”

Startled, Dream's head shoots up. "W-What?"

George is blushing. "When you touch me, I burn."

"Is that good?"

"I don't know." He laughs a bit. "I don't know anything."

Dream stands. George pushes himself further into the couch, brows squished together in uncertainty.

"Would you be okay with me touching you?" He asks.

"Depends on how you touch me," George chuckles.

"Would it scare you if I held your hand?"

He shakes his head.

"How about a hug?"

"Y-you can hug me, dummy."

"What would you do," Dream holds his breath, "if I kissed you right now?"

George's eyes widen just enough for the light to catch them. His head tilts. "I... I don't know."

"Would you let me?"

"... Yeah."

Dream drops to his knees, gripping the sides of George's face with both hands. As their lips connect, the world behind his eyelids explodes with color. His heart hums to the trumpets in his ears, bursting the dam between his chest and his mind. Every single one of his senses is flooded with the emotions he'd tamped down for years, afraid of the consequences.

To hell with the consequences. Finally, he knows what he wants. Dream wants George in his entirety. He wants to hear his laugh and see him in real time, not just through airpods and shitty face cams. He wants to hold his hand without fearing he'll pull away, get to know every inch of George's skin in the way only lovers can. He wants to keep his bed warm, wake up and see that stupid, beautiful face.

Dream wants to hold George and be held in return.

George's hands find his chest, fingers twisting into the fabric of his sweatshirt. He breaks the kiss first, eyes shining with gratification.

"I never told you this. You're the sun," George breathes.

The taste of honey and lemon linger on Dream's lips. He gently runs his thumb under George's eyes, tracing the dark bags underneath, and allows a giggle to push out of his throat. Thunder murmurs outside.

"I think this is better," he chuckles, "than just dancing around it."

Moths on fire.

“Have you figured it out yet? What you want?” George asks.

“I dunno, I think we’ll need to try again.” Dream’s lips ghost over his.

He pants out a laugh. “Are we dating now?”

“Do you want to?”

“Can we come back to that later?”

“Of course. But for now...”

They kiss again. And again.

And again.

Ablaze

Chapter Summary

friday comes around, and they have some fun

tw: alcohol drinking, sexual content

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Friday rolls around, and Dream can't stop smiling.

He hums softly to himself as the four eat breakfast, not tuned into the conversation occurring around him. His heart sings to *Let The Sun In* that plays in his headphones, tearing through his peanut butter and blackberry jelly sandwich, and only returns to reality when a pair of fingers snap in front of his face.

“What?” Dream glances up.

Sapnap pulls his hand back and grins with knowledge he shouldn’t have. “Turns out the storm should be over by Sunday, so out flights will be fine.”

“Oh, cool!”

“What do you wanna do on our last two days here, Dream?” Bad asks, setting down his foam mug of coffee. “Given you and George don’t run off together again.”

George coughs. “Shut up, Bad.”

“Sorry!”

“We could check out the park a few blocks down.” Dream looks out the glass front doors, where the storm has lightened up enough to see sunlight. “It looks like it’s gonna clear up soon.”

Bad nods in agreement. “That sounds fun!”

“Alright, the park it is. I’m gonna shower first, and we can go. George, come with me, it’s too dark.” Sapnap finishes his bacon and drags George upstairs with him.

When they’re alone, Bad turns his head to Dream, grinning. “So, I’m guessing you two finally had that talk, huh?”

“We did.” Dream mimics his smile, the corners of his cheeks aching. “We kissed.”

“Holy cow, really? How do you feel?”

“Unreal. I feel like I’m going to float off at any moment.”

“So, you guys are official or...?”

He shakes his head. "No. We haven't talked about that yet, but I'm leaving the decision up to him. Long distance isn't easy, especially when the distance is an ocean."

The sad little chuckle Bad lets out makes Dream wonder if he understands that feeling.

"Hey, how are you and Skeppy doing?"

Bad blinks, a blush sprouting over his cheeks. "Is it that obvious?"

"You guys are more affectionate than I am. How long?"

"Three months." He runs a finger around the rim of his cup. "I've been meaning to tell you guys, but it never felt like the proper time."

"I'm happy for you."

Sapnap and George appear. They exchange quick banter before clearing off their table and heading out.

With the lessening strength of the hurricane, their umbrellas can take the hits as they follow their phone's directions to the park. Bad leads the way. He and Sapnap argue as Google Maps switches between two different routes. Dream and George follow a few feet back, their clasped hands hidden by thick coat sleeves.

Pinpricks of raindrops prod Dream's cheeks, the umbrella masking any outside sound from piercing their bubble of serene silence.

George sighs with a contentment Dream has never heard in his voice before. Lashes flutter gently against his cheekbones as he blinks. His eyes follow the signs of the passing businesses. The frigid December air turns his nose and ears rosy, soft huffs of fog escaping his pink lips.

Dream slows them to a stop, using his free hand to tip George's head back, and kisses him without a care of who sees. A hand presses against his chest. He opens his mouth and gently takes George's bottom lip between his teeth.

"Are you guys done?" Sapnap interjects.

They jump apart, George letting go of his hand and putting it over his face. Dream clears his throat, face hot to the touch.

"Sorry," he mutters.

The park has few visitors, mostly dogs and their owners, with a group of joggers taking up the sidewalk around it. Dew clings to the thick, overgrown grass that has turned a yellowed brown. It tickles Dream's ankles as they walk to the center of the circle. George brushes their shoulders together.

He wants to hold his hand again, but fears running into a fan. Neither of them are mentally prepared to be public, especially when they're not officially dating yet.

Sapnap closes his umbrella, shaking it off, and pulls his raincoat good over his head. "Do you think we need to wear masks here?"

Bad's already putting his on, a black fabric with a little muffin on it. "Better safe than sorry," he says.

They mask up, walking a safe distance from the other tourists. As they reach the center, Sapnap fawns over every dog that passes them, cooing and making grabby hands at them. Bad holds him back by his hoodie, laughing.

“Snapmap, stop!” He giggles, getting a pout in response. “We’re social distancing.”

“But they’re so fucking cute,” Sapnap groans.

“Language!”

Dream chuckles, nudging George. “You know Bad and Skeppy are dating.”

George looks at him, gawking. “No way. He and Zak?”

“Yup.” Their hands brush together. “So, are we... you know.”

“Are we what?” The corners of his lips twitch with mischief.

“You’re really gonna make me say it?”

“You don’t have to. I thought about it.”

“And?”

“And...” George takes Dream’s hand in his own. “I don’t think we need to worry about that right now. Let’s just enjoy what we have and talk about specifics later.”

Disappointment prickles in his stomach. “As you wish.”

After chasing a squirrel around the park and getting noticed by a fan (Dream hopes they didn’t recognize his voice), they crowd a small boba tea shop. Dream orders their drinks while the others find a table. Staring at the dimly lit signs showing the menu, realization hits him. The sign is on, as are the atmospheric lights above his head.

He turns to his friends, pointing at the sign. “Guys. Power.”

It takes a few seconds before their eyes go wide. They scurry to the front.

When the hipster guy who took their order comes back with their drinks, Dream asks if the power is back in the city. He nods, explaining that, with the worst of the storm having past, they were able to repair the power lines.

“Does that mean tourist destinations are open?” George asks.

The man shrugs, scooting the carton with their cups and four wide straws.

As they walk down the street towards the center of the city, Dream glances into the sky. Streams of sunlight escape the thinning cloudlines. The thunder is infrequent and fading over the sound of passing cars, lightning melting into the newly lit buildings all around them. Fear settles deep in his gut.

The week is almost over.

“This has gotta be the best thing to happen this year,” Sapnap says, wrapping an arm over Dream’s shoulders. “Finally meeting my favorite people.”

“Aww, you sap. Nap.” Dream laughs at his own joke, getting a faux glare from his friend.

Bad stabs his straw through the cup’s plastic. “Back to the park?”

“Wait, I think we can walk to the Lincoln Memorial from here.” George holds out his phone, where he has Google Maps pulled up. “It’s like a twenty minute walk.”

After an exchange of nods to confirm that as their next destination, they follow Siri’s convoluted directions until the tall pillars of the building come into view. They walk up the stairs towards the imposing marble figure, surrounded by other tourists taking pictures. Dream holds George’s hand. It’s cold, frigid fingertips stealing the heat of his palm.

Sapnap and George shoot quips back and forth, Bad scolding them whenever a swear slips through the cracks of their usually clean insults. Dream listens and laughs. He loves his friends so damn much. If he could spend forever like this, exploring new places and being who they are over calls in person, he would.

Lights lead them up to the statue. Dream sneaks a picture of his friends as they argue over something trivial, posting it on twitter with no caption. When he shows George, he gets an eye roll then a blush.

“You know they can see us holding hands in that photo,” he says.

“Shit.”

Dream deletes the photo and retweets a new one with their hands out of sight. The damage is done, though, because the comments go crazy with theories.

The temperature drops as the warm sun drops from its apex in the sky. They take photos with the statue, Dream’s face hidden by his boba cup, and begin to walk back before realizing that the trip back would take an hour walking. Bad calls an Uber. When they get back to the hotel, they’re surprised by the bright lights on inside the lobby.

“Finally.” Sapnap sighs, spinning with his arms out. “No more flashlights.”

“Now we can actually go into that restaurant,” Bad says.

Fortunately, only a quarter of their tables have people at them, so it takes seconds for them to be seated. Dream and George sit on one side of their booth, Sapnap and Bad on the other.

Sapnap props his chin on one hand, eyes scrunching to show he’s smiling.

“So, you guys finally had sex, right?”

Dream kicks him from under the table.

“Ow!”

“I just wanna eat,” George groans, leaning his head against the wall, “without the drama of stupid feelings.”

Bad shoots Dream a confused look.

“What do you mean, stupid feel-”

Before he can finish his sentence, a waitress approaches them, a smile concealed by her mask and

notepad propped open.

“Hi, can I get you fellas some drinks?”

As they order, Dream can’t help the fear in his stomach slowly growing, molding into the shape of apprehension. He keeps replaying George’s words in his head.

Stupid feelings.

Stupid.

Does he think his confession was stupid? Maybe he meant it to be funny. But Dream glances at him, hand pulled away, and is scared of the other option.

The waitress asks him what he wants to eat. He pushes his feelings down, down, down, and forces a fake smile so his friends don’t catch onto how he’s feeling.

He’ll talk to George about it later.

--

After dinner, they head to the bar. Sapnap is the only one too young to drink, so he gets a Pepsi while the others order shots. He joins them with his soda, acting just as drunk as them by the time they get to their third round.

Dream coughs a little as he gulps down his vodka, giggling at the sour face George makes. Their faces glow with a liquor induced flush. Bad takes the drinks like a champ, the only sign of intoxication being the small f-bombs he drops between hiccups.

Warm honey spreads through Dream’s body, contrasting the cold burning traveling down his throat and making a home in his abdomen. The bartender moves on from them, serving a businessman, and they explode in laughter. What they’re laughing at, Dream doesn’t know, but it’s hilarious.

Bad falls out of his chair, and that’s when they close their tab. George orders a bottle of champagne to take the party going to their room. They sing Mamma Mia as loud as their vocal chords will allow, drunken boasts of laughter echoing through the stairwell. Sapnap holds the oldest of them up, who now seems to have been hit with the brunt of their five, six, seven rounds.

“Okay, I’ll see you guys in the morning,” he laughs, heading down to their room a few doors down.

“Bye bye, Sappitus” Dream coos, holding himself up with the wall.

George fumbles with their key, hands shaking as he laughs. He finally gets it into the locks, turns it, and turns to Dream with a look he’s never seen before. His eyes are half open, cheeks red and lips parted like they’re preparing for something.

He’s beautiful this way, uninhibited and looking at him with so much love it could melt the coldest of hearts. Dream wants to kiss him, so he does, pushing him against the frame as he does so. George falls into him, one hand hooking into his jean loops as the other gets the door open.

They fall to the floor, giggling with their lips still mashed together. Dream pulls away, taking a breath, and George yanks him back down.

“Someone will see,” he manages between kisses.

“I don’t care,” George grunts.

He tries to hold Dream down by his belt loops, thumbs burning against the bare skin of his stomach. Dream manages to break the trance long enough to flip off him and kick the door closed. As soon as he turns over, George grabs the back of his neck.

The kiss leaves Dream dizzy. He lets his full weight press George into the rough carpet as his tongue slips between plump lips, fingers tangling into his short, dark hair. Their bodies are melting pots, waves of heat radiating off his skin like a highway mirage. Somehow, they end up on the bed, on their sides, still intertwined.

Dream allows himself to be overwhelmed through all five senses. George’s fingers blazing trails under his shirt and across his happy trail. Sweat and alcohol clinging to their close and filling his head Vodka, the taste sharp on his tongue, spreading to Dream’s. The hum of the AC and soft pants filling the air. Flashes of George’s face, wrecked and hot, as he opens his eyes to capture the moment in his memory.

Suddenly, he’s on his back. A hand holds his wrists down, pressing him into the thin sheets covering the mattress. When he opens his eyes, George hovers over him, legs on either side of his waist. He reminds Dream of those documentaries with wild cats, how they prowl, eyes wide and stance hungry. George dips to his level and peppers his neck with open mouthed kisses, gentle at first before teeth graze at the prickly flesh there.

A moan rips through Dream as he sucks just under his jaw, most definitely leaving a mark behind. His eyes flutter in an attempt to close, but he manages to keep them open. As George leaves bruises on his throat, his other hand massages Dream through his jeans, forcing out sighs and squirms from him. Pleasure confronts him from all sides. George’s lips create hickeys on his skin, free hand wandering over every inch of his body with his fingers, leaving clean, smooth rows of lustful fire.

His body is alight, no longer flesh and blood. Dream is an inferno, sparked by the kiss and fueled by the contact, spreading across the room and setting everything ablaze. He arches his back with rose colored pleasure when George sinks his teeth into the skin between his neck and shoulder. When his iron grip finally slips from Dream’s wrists, his hands latch to the closest piece of George he can reach.

He maps out George’s chest, waist, thighs, and back up, memorizing the dips and ridges of his body. Their hips grind against each other, Dream underneath with his hands guiding George’s stuttering movements. Their lips clash again, incandescent.

Sobriety hits him when George begins to pull his belt out of the loops, fiddling with the button and zipper. Dream’s eyes shoot open. He grabs George’s hands.

George glances up, stopping all movements. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No, no, you didn’t do anything this is just... this is fast.”

“I’m sorry.” He immediately removes his hands, yearning fading into concern. “I’ve never done anything like this before.”

“You’re a virgin?”

“What? No! I’ve just never been with a guy.”

Dream watches him crawl off his laps, curling his legs into him. “If it makes you feel any better, neither have I. This is new to the both of us.”

He sits up, shifting so they sit together. George leans his head on his shoulder, hand running lightly over his knee and thigh. Dream pushes his hair back to kiss his forehead, a small smile forming across George’s pensive face.

“I didn’t mind everything before that,” he says. “But I don’t think I wanna do any of that yet. Not when we’re drunk.”

George huffs a little. “I agree. My body was just moving, and when I finally stopped, I didn’t even realize how fast we were going.”

“If you want, we can just keep doing other stuff.”

“I’d like that. I waited way too long to finally hold you.”

With that Dream kisses him, fervor reignited, and this time takes control. He pushes George down against the bed, body pinned down by his own, and cradles his chin to melt him. And he does, arms hanging limply to his hood. Dream pulls away, wrenching out a sonorous whine, and moves down his jaw to George’s neck.

They stay like that, leaving each other molten messes of desire and want, candle wax and kindling, love and passion, fear and uncertainty.

Chapter End Notes

my first class is today and I am tired
hope you guys enjoy this chapter! it might be a while until the next one but we'll see
>:3c

Cardinal Rule

Chapter Summary

fight

Chapter Notes

sorry about this one -.-

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next morning comes too quickly, with a crackle of lightning interrupting Dream's well deserved arrival of sleep. Low thunder rumbles in the distance. He almost falls asleep again, but another dim flash refuses to let him get comfortable again. Annoyed, he forces eye open, seeing another swirl of storm brewing above them.

“I thought the storm was supposed to be past already,” he grumbles, turning over in bed.

He feels for the body beside him, only hitting the cold side of the mattress. That wakes him up the rest of the way. Dream reluctantly sits up, searching through squints for George. After a minute or two of trying to get his eyes open long enough to see, he finds him on the other side of the room. George stares at himself in the mirror propped up on the wall, shirtless with his wrinkled jeans still on.

“Hey, did the forecast change?” Dream asks. “I swear the worst of it was over.”

No response except a sigh, heavy and tired. George runs a hand down the center of his chest.

Dream pushes the duvet off of himself and stands. “Hello? Are you sleepwalking? You look like a zombie, dude.”

“Bad said it’s only supposed to last today,” George says with a flat tone.

“Oh, the storm? Okay.”

There’s a cavity in his voice, something out of place. He can’t quite figure it out, but shakes off the weird feeling tugging him back into the bed. His head throbs as he stands up wrapping his arms around George from behind, kissing his shoulder. Dream feels tension ripple through his back under his embrace

“What are you doing?”

“What does it look like I’m doing, sweet?” Dream laughs, nuzzling his cold nose against George’s warm neck. “C’mon. Only the moon has had the pleasure of seeing us together. Let me love you under the sun, too.”

George wrenches himself out of his gentle grasp, facing away. His back is hunched, arms stiff and

trembling. Stunned by his reaction, Dream doesn't touch him, but he steps close. “

“Did I do something wrong?” He asks, unsure how to proceed. “Is this about last night?”

George turns halfway, still not meeting the other's persistent gaze. “What are you talking about?”

“Don't act dumb, you dork. You know, how we almost-“

“Nothing happened.”

The brakes in his mind shriek to a halt as he processes what was just said. George absentmindedly scratches at his neck. Dream spots a small dark bruise just under his jawline, along with a trail of lighter, fading ones leading to his collarbone. He wonders how similar the marks on himself are.

“What do you mean?” Fear trickles in. “Do you not remember?”

Misplaced thunder grumbles in the background. George's shadow blocks the lightning's touch from striking him.

“Please, I wasn't *that* hammered. I remember everything. But it didn't really mean anything.”

Nothing in his voice gives away any underlying emotions. No fear, no desire, no hatred. His tone is stagnant and cold.

“It didn't-“ Dream inhales sharply. His insides twist into the ugly shape of dread. “What are you talking about?”

“We were drunk.”

“Yeah, but-”

“But what?”

A light sprinkle of rain fills the air.

“Right. It was nothing.”

George nods. He still won't meet his eye.

“Exactly. Just another mistake.”

And there it is. *Mistake*. George thinks it's a mistake. Acting on his feelings is a mistake.

Dream's skin burns all over. Every inch of his body thrums with nervous energy, and his stomach knots into the form of a tormenting fear he can't fathom. He blinks rapidly, forbidding the tears to come. Anger rises in his throat.

“You can't just say that. You can't just pretend anymore,” he mutters, standing up.

“What did you say?”

George finally faces him. His eyes are empty. Dead shark eyes devoid of any indication that the kiss meant anything. As if he wasn't just gazing at Dream the night before like he held the universe in his irises. He presses his lips into a skinny frown.

“You know what, you're right. It doesn't matter. It never did, not to you.” Dream surprises himself

with the amount of malice he coats his words in. “But to me- god, how blind are you?”

When George doesn’t respond, Dream continues his tirade.

“This- this is bullshit. All of it. I’m so fucking done tiptoeing around you. At least be honest with me and say you don’t feel the same way about me instead of telling me to pretend that I didn’t give you those hick-”

“Don’t-“

“Don’t what, George?”

“*Don’t* turn this on me.” He jabs an accusing finger in Dream’s direction. “You’re the one overthinking some stupid shit that happened when we were both drunk out of our minds, when we weren’t even thinking about the consequences of our actions.”

“Consequences, what fucking consequences?” Dream throws his hands in the air.

George visibly grits his teeth. “We broke a cardinal rule last night. Best friends aren’t supposed to do that together. And now people are going to know, people are going to see.”

“You said you didn’t care whether people see or not.”

“You could barely stand last night. Do you really expect me to take what happened between us seriously?”

“Maybe, I don’t know. We weren’t drunk when we kissed. I thought at least *that* would’ve meant something to you.” *Like how it meant something to me.*

“Why would it?”

The words shoot cleanly through his chest.

This can’t be happening. He can’t lose his best friend like this.

“Oh my fucking- you are insufferable!” He’s shouting now.

George raises his voice to match. “And you’re not? You touch me, flirt with me, turn me on, and then confess to me all in one week without giving me time to process. If anyone should be pissed off, it should be me for having to deal with you playing me like a bloody instrument!”

“What the hell do you mean, not giving you time? I gave you so much time! We leave tomorrow, I could’ve kissed you in the elevator, in the pool, I could’ve woken you up and kissed you when you were having a *wet dream* about me. But I wanted this to be on your terms, even though you gave me jack shit to work with. I gave you power here, but you keep dancing around the issue like a fucking moth on fire!”

“Because you’re messing with my head!” George stomps his foot like a petulant child.

They shout over each other, a contest of volume. Words deteriorate until they’re nothing more than congealed syllables without vowels or consonants to give them any meaning. Dream doesn’t even know if he’s saying anything anymore. All he hears is their anger colliding, clouding over, striking, roaring.

His face is ablaze, veins igniting the rest of his body as his fury sears a hole in his chest. He paces back and forth in the space between the bed and the TV, trying to relieve his body of the kinetic

energy building in his bones.

Dream is a match, struck and turning to cinders. George is already ash.

A break in the yelling comes when Dream takes a step forward, his glower giving George pause.

“You always do this! Always play innocent, always like it’s everyone’s fault but yours. But you keep making excuses to ignore your own feelings, then shove the blame on others when things bubble over. Just fucking talk to me, George! Just tell me-” he takes a breath, feeling his throat close up. “Just tell me what I am to you.”

George makes a gasping sound like he can’t understand what he’s saying. “What the hell do you mean, what are you to me? You’re my best friend, I’m not trying to ruin what we’ve made together by letting my emotions get out of hand. Emotions, mind you, that came and went.”

“What, so you don’t feel it anymore?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“Then clear it up!” Dream breaks the sound barrier with that.

“I had a crush on you before, but those went away because I thought you’d never feel the same, and I made peace with that.” George makes a fist. “But here you are, pulling them back up, when I don’t even want to feel this way!”

Frustration stuns Dream in place. He doesn’t know if he wants to punch George or kick a wall. Or both. “Well, pardon me for trying to figure my shit out instead of pretending like it doesn’t exist, because news flash asshole- I did that too! I went down the repression route already, and look where it got me. Look where it got *us* !”

Dream gestures wildly between them, losing whatever semblance of composure he had.

“What the fuck did *I* do? *You’re* the one who kissed *me* !”

Despite the shouting match, no emotion leaks through George’s facade. Not even a lick of anger, frustration, or disgust. His voice, however, displays the fury his face hides.

“Yeah, I did, and I don’t regret it!” Dream’s head is spinning. “And if you were uncomfortable, you could’ve pushed me away, told me to fuck off, but you wanted it just as much as I-”

George cuts him off with the cutting blade of a laugh. “Oh, you’re such a hypocrite. You don’t even know what you want!”

Dream slams his fist down into the duvet. “I know what I want, for the first time in my miserable fucking existence, and what I want is you!”

The air fills with temporary silence as he catches his breath.

“It was you. It was always you.” The tears return, too close to the tipping point. “I am so fucking in love with you, and I somehow convinced myself that you felt the same. But if you really don’t want to love me back, then that hurts, but I can live with it. I can’t live with you avoiding me.”

Like a boiling pot.

Their heavy breathing fills the silence.

George speaks next, his voice dropping to a whisper. “Let’s just... drop it, okay? This isn’t worth ruining our friendship over.”

He can’t believe what he’s hearing. Did George not hear a word Dream said? Or is he so dense that he still wants to just toss this shit under the rug?

“You don’t get it,” Dream gets out through clenched teeth. “You don’t fucking get it.”

“I’m sorry for yelling, I just got frustrated. You’re my best friend, and I-”

“What if I want to be more?” The words slip out. “Than best friends.”

Another shock of silence.

George stares at him, mouth moving like he’s looking for the right words. “Clay...”

“I never would’ve even *thought* about making a move on you if I didn’t think you were the least bit interested in me. You know I’d never push you into doing anything, but you still haven’t given me a straight answer. We almost- we went so far, and you still refuse to respond.”

His friend just stands there. The air is so thick Dream gasps for air. Hot prickles of anxiety run under the surface of his skin.

“Let’s just... drop the subject, okay?” George holds his hands out like he’s trying to calm a rabid animal. “I’m sure you’re still hungover, and you don’t know what you’re saying. Let’s sleep it off and then move on when we’re clear headed.”

After all of this, everything Dream has done, he still ends up without an answer. Needles of dismay stab through his ribs.

This is it.

This is what ends them.

“You wanna pretend like none of this happened? Not my confession, the kiss, last night, even this fucking fight? Fine by me. I could give less of a shit.” Dream snatches his hoodie off the bed. “Do whatever you want, but you won’t be doing it with me.”

“Clay-”

“I meant every single god damn word I said this week, sober or drunk, and if you can’t accept that as truth, fine.” Dream’s vision swims as his heart rises into rage before slipping back to anguish. “I can handle rejection, George, so you don’t need to worry about sparing my feelings. But you’re so scared of what ifs you’re willing to pretend nothing ever happened, and I just can’t do that. I’m sorry, I- I can’t pretend like I don’t love you anymore.”

His chest marches to the drum of his emotional colosseum, fighting for dominance. For a moment, the mask cracks, and distress flashes across George’s face. He reaches for Dream, but he knocks his hand away.

“From the bottom of my heart, fuck you.”

The last two words lose their bite as his voice cracks. Dream gnaws on the inside of his cheek, knowing if he speaks any more, he’ll really break down. The tears come back in double time.

Still, George doesn’t move. Dream pushes past him, aiming for the door. He can’t spend another

second in that hellish room. Not with George just standing there, pretending like he doesn't know what he's talking about.

“Dream.” George sighs, sounding annoyed at him. “ *Clay* , where are you going?”

Dream doesn't respond, fearful of what else he'll say or do to further ruin their friendship, and slams the door behind him. For a moment, he waits, praying that George follows, even if it's just to have a shouting match. All Dream wants him to say that he cares, or to say he doesn't. He wants anything but silence.

All he wants is for him to want him back.

Nothing happens.

Guided by the monotone gray morning light, Dream runs to the stairwell, stumbling down the steps before reaching a platform. His stomach churns, nausea overtaking his senses. He curls up, arms wrapped as tight as he can around his waist.

Proximity can rekindle emotions that have been snuffed out.

God, how could he have been so reckless? With just the hint of alcohol in his bloodstream, he gives into his heart. He won't look George in the eye after this. His stomach can't handle it.

George. His eyes, glimmering with mischief in the phone light. Fingertips dancing along his jawline. Warm skin pressed to his own. Soft lips against his. The wine staining his tongue. That damned smile, so full of affection Dream tricked himself into thinking it was love.

Don't you see the way he looks at you? You're the sun in his eyes.

He straightens himself, swallowing down the bile in the back of his throat, and starts to shake his hands out. Dream needs to get rid of this excess buzzing. There's too much energy in him, revving every part of his mind into overdrive. He might just catch fire if he can't burn it.

Moths on fire.

The thunder hits too close, and Dream screams. He screams even as his voice gives out, harsh wheezing tearing through his throat. Dream only stops when he runs out of air. Salt smolders against his tongue, the tears finally breaking through. Darkness presses against him on all sides, broken up only by the harsh streaks of white hot lightning.

I'm all of that to you?

You're everything to me.

It was stupid of him to assume George would've felt the same way. Dream's sexuality is ambiguous, but George has clearly stated before he's straight. He shouldn't have even hoped for a different outcome.

But his hands were so warm on his neck. And his laugh-

Would you be okay with me touching you?

Would it scare you if I held your hand?

How about a hug?

What would you do if I kissed you right now?

Would you let me?

Dream throws his arm back and slams his fist as hard as he can into the concrete wall. He hears a crack. A flare of pain races up to his shoulder. His knees finally buckle, sending him crumbling to the floor.

Curling into a ball, he continues to scream, his harsh cries devolving into heavy sobs. His hand throbs along to the beat of his heart. Dream feels cold, the angry fire drowned out by a flood of every drop of emotion he'd tamped down.

It destroys him all at once.

The door above him slams open, streaks of a flashlight blinding him. Bad rushes down the stairs to him. He's speaking, but the words just sound like nonsense syllables. Dream reaches for him, whited out vision swimming in and out of focus.

“Darryl, I think-” he sobs. “I think I broke my hand.”

Bad helps him to his feet, Dream still hysterical, and guides him back upstairs. He holds his breath as they pass his room.

When you touch me, I burn.

The hotel door swings open, and Dream collapses again. This time, his friend catches him, half dragging him to the couch, where he succumbs to the stiff navy cushions.

Chapter End Notes

the new heat waves chap actually killed me I'm now a ghost

Unhealthy Things

Chapter Summary

dream has the best friends

Chapter Notes

im tempted to write a cryptid!AU fit about the dream team when I'm done with this one, I already have so many ideas

Morning melts into afternoon. Dream only knows because of the neon green clock on the nightstand mocking him with the slow pace of time. He lies on the couch, staring holes into the wall and replaying the week in his head.

With time at a snail pace, he tries to figure out where he went wrong, what he did to elicit that reaction from George, why they were so close to finality when it all came crumbling down. This whole weekend was a mistake. Even from the beginning, disaster followed them; it began with the tropical storm and ended with Dream destroying the most important relationship to him.

His heart is a tangle of wires and bitter blood. The tears come and go. He switches between crying hard enough to cramp his stomach and going so numb he forgets about the throbbing in his fist. Every part of him aches with regret and rage. As angry as he wants to be, he can't feel anything for too long before his body goes into what he assumes shock feels like.

Sapnap and Bad cycle through the hotel room to keep him company, never once leaving him alone. They don't confront him about the fight, which he's grateful for, because he can't relive it through explanation. Their presence is a comfort he doesn't deserve. If he'd been alone, his mind would've been in far worse places than he already was.

His eyes focus on nothing for too long, brain shutting down and restarting like a broken computer. Memories play on loop, not just the trip so far. Every little quip, every flirtatious moment between then. He remembers George blushing at his words, the quiet nights where they fall asleep on call, Dream comforting him after Luca passed. They'd always been close, as close as they could be with an ocean between them, but he never thought closing the distance would destroy what they made together.

“Help me darling, now I’m feeling so lost,” he mutters flatly. “Help me darling...”

One stream, he'd almost slipped up. A dono asked George to tell Dream he loved him, and he was adamant in not doing so. Dream was having a bad day, keeping it locked in so he didn't ruin the vibe, but he whined. He begs George to say it, complaining and pushing him until George, through his facecam, slammed his keyboard against his desk.

Annoyance is common between them. He loves to annoy Sapnap, who gets easily frustrated when he does poorly in Hypixel. George is just as easy to bother. Dream doesn't know when he pushes

past their limits, but they usually tell him when he's going too far.

This time, however, George's burst of anger shuts Dream up. His face, glowing under his lamp, turns pink with hints of rage. He immediately turns his facecam and mic off. As soon as they're alone, he tears into Dream, telling him to stop pushing the issue. George rants, his hands banging against his desk as his voice rises and rises. Dream has to take his headphones off so his eardrums stay intact.

Once he runs out of breath, Dream stays quiet. It's hard to render him speechless, but George somehow achieved it. He just stares at their paused game, not realizing when George resumes his stream, and he speaks.

"I love you, George. I'm sorry, I never want you to-"

"Dream, I'm streaming."

Partially embarrassed, mostly afraid, Dream leaves discord.

Later that night, when George finishes his stream, he calls Dream up to talk. They discuss everything that's been bothering them, about boundaries they can push and lines that should never be crossed. A part of Dream broke that night. He thought he'd damaged their friendship for good and didn't stop apologizing until George told him to stop.

"Just remember boundaries exist," he tells Dream. "You know that I... care about you a lot. But I don't want everything out there, okay?"

His phrasing had confused Dream, but it didn't last. Bad blood never lasted too long between them, and soon he forgot about it, locking that memory away. However, he always tried to keep a distance. Even then, maybe George was trying to tell him how he felt, but fear held him back.

Fear held them both back.

He doesn't even hear Bad walk up to him until he's in front of his face. The sudden shadowy form of his friend crouching in front of him startles Dream, but he refuses to move. Dream wipes the drying tears from his cheeks but allows his expression to remain despondent.

"Clay, can I see your hand?" Bad asks, holding a first aid kit.

Dream stares at him, slowly repeating those words before they make sense in his head. He holds the shaking hand out, wincing as Bad takes it in his own. The knuckles have swollen into a large bump on the back of his hand, the bruise a sick green-purple and tender to the touch. A twitch of his finger sends a series of painful pulses up his arm.

"How did you know where to find me?" Dream watches him slowly work his hand open.

It surprises him how gentle Bad is. He has surgeon hands, delicate and steady, like he's used to this. With a calm demeanor, he unfurls Dream's fingers one by one, stopping when he flinches and soothes him with cotton words before continuing until his hand is open.

"You guys were loud," Bad says, voice slightly trembling. "I wish I'd found you sooner."

The ice pack is nice on his fist, numbing the pain enough for him to relax his arm.

"Can you... tell me how you and Skeppy started dating?" Dream asks.

After tearing open a package, Bad uses an alcohol wipe to clean his stiff but unclenched fist, his face empathetically sad. At first, Dream wonders why he's using alcohol on his hand when he didn't break the skin, then the burning sets in, and he flinches.

"It's not that exciting of a story," Bad chuckles.

"Tell me. Please."

Sigh.

"Okay. Remember how Skeppy wanted to create his own hype house? Well, the only ones who could actually move in at first were just me and him. The others had to wait for their leases to end, so that gave us a few months by ourselves. I... wasn't in a good place then."

Dream tilts his head, confused. He doesn't expect Bad to be happy every day, but he's nothing is not the center of their group's optimism. To think of him being in a bad place makes him feel guilty for not noticing.

"I did a lot of unhealthy things to cope. I've been doing it since I was a kid, and my parents never really noticed, so I thought I was good at hiding. I wasn't. Skeppy found out, and he helped me through it. Eventually, it just happened." Pink dusts his cheeks as Bad speaks. "I think he kissed me first, and next thing we know we were dating. He didn't want it to be a big deal, so we haven't told anyone except you guys so far."

"What were you doing? The unhealthy things."

Bad flinches.

"I'd rather not talk about it," he says. "If you don't mind."

"Oh. Sorry."

"It's okay. I guess there are some things that will always be hard to talk about, even with me, the happy go lucky one. Don't worry about me, Dream, really. I'm getting help. You know, you might benefit from therapy, too."

"Are you trying to tell me something?" Dream jokes.

"You don't need to be messed up to go to therapy. Sometimes you need to talk. Plus, don't you have ADHD? You've seen therapists before."

He scratches at his neck, uncomfortable heat in his face. "Let's change the subject. Have you- have you seen him?"

Bad pauses, exhaling in mild fury. He's never seen Bad mad before, besides the faux irritation he shows on streams, and Dream fears that their fight is what finally brings out that side of him.

When he responds, the chiding in his voice is soft, although his face gives away his true emotions. "I don't know if we should take you to the hospital or not. It looks bad, but it might just be the bruising."

"I wanna go home." Dream sounds like a child. "I'm tired, Bad. I'm so, so tired."

With the blood gone, he finally sees the damage he'd done to himself. The skin of his knuckles is torn off, the dark bruises forming over them hiding the wounds from a simple glance over. Messy

crescent cuts line the bones, which thankfully aren't jutting out. Dried blood has caked over the injuries, hiding them from his sight.

"Is Sapnap with him?"

Once Bad places the bandages on the cuts, he lets go and smiles, though it's obvious he's forcing it. His jaw is too tense, teeth not showing, and his knuckles are white.

"He is. It took him twenty minutes to convince George to let him in the room. He's, well, he's not in a good way."

"Gee, how awful," Dream drawls out sarcastically, feeling guilty for his own bitterness.

"This is hard for him too."

He tilts his head, scowling. The anger from the fight resurfaces swiftly and only for a moment, just enough time for him to blow up.

"It's hard for him? For him?" He roars, making Bad back up. "Did he tell you what happened last night? Or this morning? He *destroyed* me, Darryl. I'm rubble. He deserves whatever he feels."

His energy drops to the floor, anger gone and replaced with remorse. Scalding tears plop against his wrist. Bad holds his arms out, always welcoming and forgiving, and Dream hides his agony in his shoulder, sobbing until he turns into lava, shapeless and too hot to handle.

"I'm so sorry, Clay," Bad murmurs. "I didn't mean to sound like I was invalidating your feelings, I promise I'm not. But neither of you should be alone right now. He didn't tell me anything, and I don't want to push you with questions..."

"I thought he wanted this too, how could I have been so wrong," he whimpers.

Bad allows him to air out his woes, hardly speaking, mostly screaming, and never lets go. As guilty as Dream wants to feel for how loud he'd gotten, disturbing the neighbors, but exhaustion overtakes him and he returns to his catatonic state from before. Trapped in a whirlwind of thought, he stares at Bad, who speaks to him to keep him tether.

Night sends the storm away as the sun disappears behind the city skyline. The electricity flickers between working and not. Sometimes, the lights will go out, sending Dream into a spiral of darkness, of wonder and despair as if he'd always been alone in the vast emptiness of unseeable space, until the power returns. It's hard to remember he's not alone, that Bad is across the room talking to him while trying to charge his computer.

The sparse thunder scares him. He doesn't know why he's so on edge, every noise just a hair too loud makes him leap out of his skin. Whenever he'd jump or yelp, Bad would look at him and as if he was okay. Dream would nod, curl further into himself, and try not to think about what George was doing.

Sapnap comes in, red to the ears with fury, and he paces around the room for a few minutes before he sits down. Dream wants to ask him what's wrong, but doesn't have the strength nor the mental fortitude for the answer he'd receive.

"I- I thought you guys talked it out," Sapnap growls, feet moving faster than his eyes can track.

"They did," Bad answers for him.

“Then why did this happen?” He throws his hands towards the door, entire body tensed up with curdling anger. “This vacation was supposed to be a stepping stone for us. The four of us meet, you two can finally get your shit together, and we have a good time. We’re the fucking dream team. Unbreakable. Inseparable. This can’t be what tears us apart.”

“I’m sorry,” Dream mumbles, the words repeating softly from his lips.

The edge in his friend’s face falls blunt. “Clay, it- it’s nobody’s fault. Not even George’s, no matter how pissed off he makes me.”

“How is he?”

“He’s not… good. Shit. How did we get here?”

Bad doesn’t say anything about his language.

“I’m sorry. I ruined the trip.” Dream doesn’t know the words make it to their ears until their heads whip in his direction.

“Don’t blame yourself,” Bad says at the same time Sapnap starts to yell.

“This isn’t fucking fair!” He grabs his hair, beginning his pace again. “I don’t want to lose anybody. I can’t lose anybody. You guys are my best friends.”

Dream curls into himself, silent weeping. This was Sapnap’s biggest fear- losing those closest to him and being left alone. He remembers how he clung to Dream a kid, never wanting to be by himself even for a second. Back then, he promised never to hurt Sapnap like that.

He promised all of his friends different things. Sapnap, to never be alone. Bad, to not take his good fortune for granted. George, to love him unconditionally.

One by one, he failed them all.

Eventually, Sapnap’s rant ends, and the three sit there, in the occasional darkness. Dream stares into the pitch black nothing. His mind wanders where his body can’t, taking him step by step through the back five days, overanalyzing the situations he put himself into, the moments he forced George into, the confusion he must’ve been feeling.

Maybe it is his fault. Maybe he did fuck with George’s head and confuse him into thinking he did like Dream when those feelings has long since faded away. Maybe he’s the one who ruined their friendship. Maybe they were never meant to be together.

Dream lies on the couch, frozen in the fetal position, until the sun makes its round once more.

Derelict

Chapter Summary

the flight back home.

Chapter Notes

I've got so many ideas for new fics after this one and I can't decide which one I wanna do

The airport at eight am is half empty and still, like a liminal space. Wanderers get their early coffee from the Starbucks at the entrance, kids begging their parents for happy meals. A woman narrates flights, canceled and delayed, around them. Some business man with a service dog walks by them, but nobody even bats an eye.

When they woke up around six, Dream was awake, staring into oblivion with dried tracks down his cheeks. Bad somehow convinced him to get off the couch and take a shower before they left for the airport. He managed to do so in Bad and Sapnap's hotel room, thankful for the hot water that left pink patches on his back when he got out. He has on loose carpenter jeans and his Apollo hoodie, which is big enough to cover his neck. Sapnap, ever the MVP, gathered his things from the other room so he could pack and have fresh clothes to wear.

Bad and Sapnap look more presentable than he feels, clothes slightly wrinkled but neat. Dream's hair is untamed, pulled into a small ponytail at the base of his neck so he didn't have to brush it. His unshaven face is hidden behind his mask. He refuses to look at George.

Sterile LED lights aligning the ceiling blind their tired eyes. Dream rubs his own with his good hand, dry from little sleep and excessive crying. His heavy limbs drag him. The four head down to check in their bags, having not said a single word since leaving the hotel.

Luckily, with only half of the usual amount of fliers, they check their luggage in with enough time to spare. They get in the TSA line, splitting up into two lines as they go. Dream and Sapnap have a silent chugging contest to see who can finish their water bottles before they reach the moving belt. Sapnap wins. George is stopped by a guard, who triple checks his passport before allowing him to rejoin the line. Bad's bag gets pulled to the side, checked, and returned.

Once they get their shoes on and book bags packed, the four head to Starbucks to get coffee, nobody except Bad speaking. He understands the tension between them and seems to be making an effort to dissolve it, though it's a hopeless battle. Small fun facts, humming that achy breaky heart song, even talking about plans for the next manhunt video.

Nobody answers any of his questions. George pretends like they don't even exist. Dream barely makes eye contact, running on autopilot since they left the hotel. Sapnap looks a minor inconvenience away from committing murder. Eventually, Bad stops trying.

Just a week earlier, they'd been over the moon to see each other. Sapnap arrived first, Bad and Dream's flight landing three hours after his. They were supposed to meet up at the bag carousel, but Bad got sidetracked and wanted to get a keychain for Skeppy from a gift shop. After half an hour of going through souvenirs, Sapnap called Dream, saying that he was lost and couldn't find where to pick up his suitcase.

He was so loud that Dream could hear him outside of his phone, so he and Bad followed the yelling until they found him on the opposite side of where the carousels were. They shouted his name to get his attention, and the moment he saw Dream, he tackled him into a hug. Despite knowing each other since they were kids, barely teenagers, and almost meeting several times before, actually seeing him there is a whole other feeling. Phone calls, facetimes, they weren't as personal as holding one of his favorite people in the world.

They checked into their hotel and repeated the process when George's flight landed around midnight. Dream forgot about the time zone difference, and the layover flight. George was so tired when he landed he walked right past them, despite them saying his name loud enough to get attention from other tired passengers.

Eventually, he noticed them, saw Bad first, then Sapnap, and finally his eyes found Dream's, and they froze in mutual shock. George was beautiful then, with his hair spiked from sleeping during the flight and lips stained red from plane wine. He dropped the bag of chips he had and, just like clockwork, broke out into a sprint for Dream. They fell over from the inertia, but once George was in his arms, Dream refused to let go. uj

“- Antfrost getting all the iron, just like last time.” Bad is talking about their last manhunt. “I’m really glad he joined us, he and I carry the hunters.”

“I dunno about that,” Sapnap replies, halfheartedly trying to break the silence.

“Oh, come on, if you guys ever listened to me, Dream wouldn’t win so much.”

“He’s the best minecraft player in the world, he’s always going to win!”

“I mean, we did win last time because of Ant,” Bad sings.

“Okay, fair enough.” Sapnap goes to elbow George, and stops himself. His brows furrow. “It’s good to have someone more of an underdog than you, Bad.”

Dream scrolls through twitter, glancing over the most recent tweets from his mutuals. The SMP seems to be pushing the story further without them there, good thing he has Techno as a co writer. Some fans seem concerned about their safety because of the storm.

As they get their drinks, he can’t hold himself back, and he looks up from his phone. The first thing he notices is George wearing a turtleneck, which covers most of the hickeys. One sits under the black fabric, a maroon bruise peeking from under the smooth, shaven skin of his jaw. Dream dares to look at George, just for a moment, and finds him staring before their gazes flit away. It must be the lighting, but his eyes look red, puffy, sad. He wonders if he regrets the fight, too.

With the fresh wound of memories reopening by a mere glance, Dream has to tilt his head back to force the tears down. His throat closes up, blood rushing to his face, and he goes to the bathroom to calm himself before he has a panic attack. When he comes back, their drinks are done and Bad tries again, unsuccessfully, to stir conversation.

Sapnap's flight leaves first at ten am, a straight shot to Dallas. From where they start walking, it

takes ten minutes to make it to his terminal near the left end of the airport. Bad and George sit in chairs, while Dream and Sapnap take to the floor.

“Sap, what’re gonna do when you get home?” Bad asks cheerily.

“I’m gonna take a nap,” Sapnap replies. “And call Karl. I forgot to text him this entire trip.”

“Text him now! When I get home, I’m gonna give Skeppy a big hug, I miss him so-” he stops himself, glancing nervously around the group before changing gears. “I miss Rat too! I’m going to spoil her with some bacon treats when I get home.”

The announcer tells them the flight to Dallas has begun boarding.

“Dream, what are you gonna do?” Sapnap nudges him.

Taking a sip from his caramel macchiato, Dream looks up at his friend. “I... I’m going home for Christmas. My parents love having us over for holidays, and it’s been a while since I’ve seen my family.”

George’s gaze rises until he’s almost looking Dream in the eye.

“I’m gonna get Cat a new collar,” he says.

Their heads turn to him. Bad’s eyes wrinkle, looking satisfied in the slow progress they’ve made.

Another announcement tells them Sapnap’s group has begun boarding. With a loud exhale, he hugs Bad, smiling for the first time today, and doesn’t pull himself away until Bad starts giggling, telling him he’s going to be late. Sapnap lets go and turns to Dream.

The warm embrace he gives is undeserved. Out of everyone there, Dream has known him the longest, and even despite their friendship closing in on a decade, he doesn’t want to let go. He has to force himself to part with his friend.

When Sapnap moves onto George, he just stares, obviously pissed, but hugs him anyways. He mumbles something in his ear, eliciting a nod and sniffle.

“Don’t get stranded,” Sapnap says, hefting his bag over his shoulders. “Fuckin’ storms.”

“Text us when you land!” Bad calls as their friend runs in line to board.

The attendant scans his ticket. Sapnap turns and gives them one last wave before disappearing through the doors. George is already walking away, swift and tense. Dream waits until Bad starts to leave before following, his backpack suddenly too heavy for its content.

As they walk with no destination, George looks back at him, head whipping before Dream can fully catch his gaze, and walks a bit slower. Bad’s shoulders sag.

“H-hey!” He pulls Dream to keep pace with him and points to a small pizzeria. “They have personal pizzas, wanna get some?”

“I *am* hungry,” Dream says.

Three pizzas and an awkward conversation later, the time for George’s departure comes.

Dream and Bad’s flight is in Terminal A, on the opposite end of where they are, with George’s right beside Sapnap’s, where the international flights leave from.

The three stop in front of the sign designating George's flight. The grayed sun spreads haunting shadows across his face when he faces them fully. He looks like he didn't sleep for weeks, despite it only being a day, and his clothes are wrinkled and carelessly put on. Dream's first thought is, *good. He should be just as wrecked as I am.*

It's a selfish thought.

Bad has a happy face on, a last attempt at civility, and pulls him in to hug George, who doesn't reciprocate. Instead, he bumps his forehead against Bad's shoulder and pulls back. Dream doesn't move. A war wages behind his eyes. He doesn't want to touch him. He doesn't want him to leave. He can't stand to see his face anymore. He can't handle the distance.

Over the speaker ahead, the flight attendant declares the boarding for DC to London, with a connecting flight in New York. George looks up, eyes sliding down until they land on Dream. His dark, shark eyes attempt to relight something in him. Dream stares back, refusing to let any bit of emotion through, biting the inside of his cheek. He's always been a good liar, but chose to be honest and impulsive about his feelings. That part of him died.

"I..." George licks his lips, looking down at his untied sneakers. "This week was..."

"Be careful, George. Text us when you land in London," Bad says.

Dream doesn't speak. He can't. A hard lump of coal has made a home in his throat.

George watches him, eyes turning glassy, and nods, like he's accepting the new reality of their relationship. He pulls his backpack off his shoulder and unzips it, pulling out two objects. One is tucked into a cream colored, a card of some kind, he thinks, and the other is concealed by a plastic back with the *Natural History* logo on it.

"I nearly forgot about these," he chuckles with no hint of amusement. "Don't open it until you land. Well, I mean the bag is open, but don't- don't open the card."

His heart squeezes, making his chest hurt. Dream takes the gifts, still unable to breathe, much less speak.

Another call for boarding comes in through the intercoms. George hesitates, takes a step forward, then back, and speed walks towards the growing line.

"Dream." Bad tugs his sleeve. "We need to go. We have an hour before our flight leaves."

"G-give me a second."

"Of course."

He doesn't know what he's waiting for. Maybe some dramatic confession of love from George, with him running out of the plane to kiss Dream and tell him that he's sorry. Dream feels horrible about wanting him to do some dramatic act of courage to prove that he cared all along and that he still loved him. It's wrong to want that. But still, a small part of him who wants to live a romcom tastes sour disappointment as he watches George slip into the line.

Whether or not he looks back, Dream doesn't let himself wonder. Instead, he turns down towards their own terminal, broken hand clamped around the card.

"Okay." He grits his teeth. "I'm ready."

“Are you sure?” Bad asks.

Dream doesn’t respond, he just starts walking. His friend follows behind.

Their flight is the latest, at noon. He and Bad find seats beside each other, gently talking between each other as they wait for the plane to arrive. Dream’s pizza tastes incredible, but he can’t enjoy it as much as he wants. Bad never stops trying to lighten his spirits, no matter how in vain the task is. Still, he loves that his friends never stop caring.

Gifts

Chapter Summary

dream gets adjusted to his new reality

The hardest part of Dream's new reality is the moments where he forgets everything's changed.

When he gets home, he goes straight to the hospital, as suggested by both Bad and his own mother. One x-ray and an interrogation later, he gets a diagnosis.

A boxer's fracture, they call it. His pinky bone is broken, and his ring finger has a hairline fracture. The doctor gets the swelling down, puts his hand in a cast that keeps his two fingers straightened out and set in place, ending halfway down his forearm so the wrist movement doesn't disturb the healing process. He gives Dream a prescription to help with the pain and asks how he broke it, as people only get those by punching something really, really hard. Dream lies, of course, saying it was an accident while messing around, and heads home, exhausted from the flight home and the hours in the emergency room.

Patches is as ecstatic as a brooding cat can be to see him finally come home, only because now he's here to feed her instead of the neighbors, who Dream thinks she hates. He fills her bowl until it overflows and buys her a toy with catnip inside for her as an apology for leaving for so long. Then, he crashes.

When he doesn't leave his bed in the first two days, she comes into his room, rubbing her head against his arm and nibbling at his fingers until he gets out. He knows it's because her bowl is empty, but he appreciates it anyways. Patches keeps him company when he cries in the shower, curled up in his sink, and doesn't leave even when he spends hours letting the water wash away whatever is left of his depression. His water bill is going to be terrifying.

She meows at him when he stares too long at his computer, doing nothing except hovering his mouse over the discord logo. The only thing that keeps him moving is having to take care of her, though he doesn't mind. Dream knows if he was alone, he'd never leave his bed.

When he's finally able to get himself out of bed, the routine returns.

Every morning, he wakes up reaching for his phone, intent on texting George good morning, and barely stops himself from hitting send every time. This repeats every morning. It takes letting his phone die overnight to break the bad habit.

Against his better judgement, Dream listens to *Let The Sun In*. He keeps it on repeat, going through the rest of the band's music, and wonders if his fans are confused as to why he's been listening to the same song.

The fans have theories, tagging him and George in posts asking if they're okay, why Dream hasn't been online, why Sapnap and Bad get all quiet when asked, why George has been so weird during his streams. That last tweet catches his attention. George acting weird on stream? Surely, his hickeys haven't healed since Dream's are still lingering.

Fun ideas for videos flutter to mind. Dream gets excited, scribbling them on sticky notes so he doesn't forget them. He loves the absurd games that he can somehow think of, already trying to plan how his video would pan out if they went through it, only for said ideas to die in the processing stage the moment he remembers, *oh right*, George always helped him with coding, and now they're not talking. The Post-Its end up in the trash.

He cooks a new recipe and resists the urge to send George a picture of his meal. Food tastes stale to him. Dream eats anyways, he'd rather rot with time rather than starve. The hurricane had left Florida long before they flew home, though the bitter cold remains as the clouds depart. Every morning, the sun greets him with vitriol. Patches is his motivation every morning. No longer does he wake up early, in sync with George's schedule, instead rising and falling with his own time zone.

On the other end, George hasn't sent a single message since landing. Not a text, a DM, not even a fucking Snap. He's active on twitter, but avoids any tweets with Dream involved. Dream knows his fans must be worried, because he hasn't posted since returning from the trip, but he can't bring himself to open anything without the temptation to check on George.

Motivated to forget, Dream busies himself with menial things. He does a deep clean of his neglected apartment, donates that bag of clothes to Goodwill he's been avoiding, and orders all the Christmas gifts he's put off buying. Sleep evades him for the first three days, and the fourth ends with him passing out across his desk, Patches meowing for a refill.

Getting out of the shower, his reflection reminds him of the what if that'll never come to pass in the form of the hickeys George left. Dream grabs a spoon, throws it in the freezer, and frantically scrapes at his neck once it's cold enough. They fade quickly, but not fast enough. He wears turtlenecks just to look at himself in the mirror.

It piles and piles, mental dirty laundry turning rancid in his mind. Every glance to their empty discord channel, every text he erases as he types, every picture he saves but refuses to send, they continue to stack high until he finally confronts it.

His limit comes in the form of his unpacked suitcase, sitting in the corner of his living room like a mortar, untouched and taking too much space. Turns out, he had some real dirty laundry he'd been avoiding as well. Dreams opens his suitcase and loads the clothes into his washer, ridding the smell of chlorine and George's skin from him. The gift George had given him is tossed into the suitcase before it's returned to the attic.

He opens up his backpack, having forgotten about it since he'd left it in his car, and surprises himself with the unexpected weight. Without memory of what could be adding to the mass, Dream unwraps pulls out his laptop, chargers, forgotten spare toothbrush, and finds a small cardboard box labeled *Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum*.

In his palm, heavy and cold, is the snowglobe. The packaging has a crushed corner and part of the cardboard is torn as the bottom. Otherwise, it's in pristine condition, empty of the small snow crystals most globes have. He'd forgotten, in the heat of everything, to give George his early Christmas present.

The thought of throwing it against the wall tempts him, but he manages to stuff it in the back of his bookshelf. If he doesn't see the snowglobe, it can't remind him of George.

A week passes, then two, and Dream hasn't streamed since arriving. He knows his friends must be texting and calling, and he carefully avoids reading their discord messages, because he really can't handle them right now.

There is one message he receives that he can't ignore.

do you wanna stream tonight

No apology, no acknowledgement, nothing.

Fury takes him over as he reads and rereads the simple, callous text, and Dream hurls his phone on the kitchen floor with as much might as he can muster. He comes back to himself the moment he hears it shatter. Spiderweb cracks cover the front and back, and only small portions of the screen light up when he presses the home button.

“Fuck.”

When the holidays come around, Dream drives up to his parent's house. It's the first time since Dream's moved out that they spend Christmas together. His sisters take turns talking his ear off at dinner. Dream gets tipsy, chugging five cups of champagne only to shut himself up.

He spends Christmas Eve with his brother in their shared childhood bedroom, catching up on all the things they've missed out on. The topic of George comes up in conversation, of course it does, but he skips over it, not wanting to hear his own voice.

In the morning, they exchange gifts. Dream gives his mom and younger sister the bracelets, his brother a matching Apollo hoodie, and a bottle of wine for his older sister. His brother gets him a new memory card, and his sisters get him a lamp for his desk and a cute new collar for Patches. Mom gets him a large frame made up of multiple smaller frames.

It has pictures of his family from vacations, graduation, and photos from their trip to DC. Dream stares at the picture in front of the Lincoln Memorial. He and George are holding hands in it, his face visible and glowing. They look so happy. George doesn't look like he has regrets or fears, and Dream hasn't seen himself that happy in a photo for years.

“I thought you'd like it,” Mom says, her beaming face falling when tears plink against the frame's glass. “Clay, honey you alright?”

Dream shakes his head. His siblings have never seen him cry before, not like this, so they stare awkwardly once he calms down enough to speak again.

“Did something happen on the trip?” His youngest sister asks.

“George and I-” Dream rubs his eyes. “We got into a fight. It was pretty bad.”

Mom rubs his back gently. “Do you wanna talk about it?”

She barely gets the question out before he starts to word vomit. As soon as he starts, he can't stop, and soon he's retelling the week in DC in excruciating detail, including some that he probably shouldn't tell in front of his mom. His words tumble out, slowly turning less and less intelligible the closer he gets to the end.

Every devastating piece of his past pours out of him as he tears open his chest to his family and exposes his heart. He can't stop it once it starts, tears mixing with snot, and he melts into broken convulsions. His brother watches with uncomfortable pity, his sisters try to console him, and his mom cries alongside him.

When he finally gets to the fight, Dream's throat closes up. Arms wrap around him from behind, his sisters holding him as he bawls, pressing the frame to his chest.

The comfort of family dissolves any semblance of normalcy he's tried to create. He wants to pretend like he's okay, like he doesn't need George in his life, but so many parts of his routine revolve around them. Even when he's home, in an environment so familiar to him, his mind ends up where it began. With George.

Finally, he drains himself of emotion, chest hollow and lungs easy. Dream breathes in, out, in, and holds it. Mom helps him stand and guides him upstairs to his room.

"You haven't talked to him since you left?" She asks him once they're alone.

"N-no, he wouldn't want to hear my voice," he mumbles. "Not after everything I said."

Mom pushes his hair out of his face, tangled strands tugging. "I think you should reach out to him. After everything that happened, I still think you two are meant for each other. Every couple fights. Even the best of friends will have moments of miscommunication, that doesn't mean you stop being friends."

"I think you missed the part where he wanted to forget everything happened." Dream licks his lips. "Maybe that was his way of rejecting me."

"Who's that greek guy you talk about so much on the server? Theo, Thes- Theseus!" Mom snaps her fingers when she gets the name.

"Yeah, what about him?" He laughs, colder than he intended. "You do know he's killed at the end of his story, right?"

"Well, that doesn't stop him from being a hero during his life. He got through the big maze and killed the minotaur, right?"

"And he abandoned people on the way to glory. Family and friends died because of his recklessness. Theseus didn't die a hero. He died disgraced."

"His death isn't what defines him." Mom's thumb brushes against his cheek, through the unshaven stubble bordering on a beard. "And neither are his mistakes. Don't let one fight tear down all the good you've built."

The tears return, slow and fragmented. "Yeah, but George is different. *I'm* different. I'm not a greek hero, I'm a dumb Youtuber. And I should've known he was uncomfortable instead of begging the universe for a happy ending and making one myself when I didn't get an answer."

Dream cracks his knuckles, wincing at the pressure on his broken hand. "I was a- a misstep away from becoming a greek tragedy. I was afraid. So, I passed the power to him. But we ended up there anyway."

She kisses his forehead. "If taking it into your hands was too much, and giving George all the power didn't work, maybe this is something you need to work on together. If you want to make this work, you need to do it with him, when you're ready."

Hearing it coming from his mother, Dream realizes how much he'd been ignoring his friend's advice.

"I... I need to apologize to Bad and Sapnap."

"Definitely. Speaking of them, how come they keep calling me to ask how you are?" She tilts her head, bro quirked in only a mother can do.

He grimaces. "I broke my phone."

"Clay!"

They laugh, and though it dies quickly, Dream relishes in the quiet chuckle exchanged between them. He feels a stray tear roll down his cheek.

"Thank you, mom. Sorry I ruined Christmas."

"You didn't ruin anything, baby." She hugs his head, gently scratching his scalp. "You might want to talk this all out with your friends, though. Silence won't do you any more good. But not right now, of course."

"Right. After Christmas."

--

He finally keeps a promise.

The day after Christmas, when he drives home, Dream decides he doesn't like being alone anymore. His mom is right, as usual. Isolation will drive him, an extrovert, insane, and it's not fair to himself or to his friends and family.

When he pulls into the driveway, Dream sits in his car, heat blasting from the air vents. His playlist is random, and each time that bastard song comes on, he skips it. It's too happy, too hopeful for his current situation.

Overwhelmed, he screams. Dream slams his good hand against the steering wheel, hitting the horn a few times, and sobs loud enough to drown out the music. His heart, shriveled and bloodless, still beats somehow. There's empty space in his ribs, enough room for hands to reach in and rip him apart from the inside.

Even with the support of his family, even with the knowledge that this won't kill him, even with logic on his side, Dream can't forget it. George's words are carved on the inside of his skull. He doesn't know why he expected talking about it would be a magic cure. His skin still burns with George's phantom touches, he's still fractured. Nothing is right yet.

"I'm not a greek tragedy," he reminds himself. "We can have a happy ending."

He takes in as much air as he can, holding his breath as his heart rate slows to a crawl. Dream presses a hand to his chest. It's not steady, but he's no longer panicking. After another deep breath, he enters his house, greeted by a pissed Patches, who meows vehemently at him for abandoning her yet again. Once he's at his desk, he opens up discord, scrolling through their group chat, catching up on what he's missed, and responds.

Sapnap immediately messages him.

its about damn time

Dream dips into the active channel, every member exploding with surprised greetings.

"*Yo, big man, where the fuck have you been?*" Tommy shouts, his speakers vibrating.

"I've got shit to do, Tomathy." Dream is already tired of them, in a good way. He missed this.

"*Calm your tits, Tommy,*" Sapnap says. "*Bad, Ant, and I were about to play bed wars, wanna join*

us?"

"Only if I can kick your ass."

Far from his mic, Dream hears Bad chastising them about language while he's streaming. The corners of his lips turn up. Normalcy is sweet on his tongue. He logs into Hypixel, wandering until he meets up with his friends.

They play a few games, Dream reels in his profanity so he doesn't disturb Bad's stream, and Tommy invades their channels every once in a while. Ant is timid as always, though he's gotten significantly better at the game and talks more. Bad talks like Dream hasn't been MIA for three weeks, and Sapnap is Sapnap.

Every few rounds, Dream starts to say a joke, looking down to their chat, only to remind himself that George isn't there. George hasn't been on their discord for weeks, he's completely cut himself off from them because Dream fucked up. He shakes it off. That's a road he can't travel down right now.

Hours pass, the moon rises, and Bad ends his stream after reading through the donos. His eyes beg to close. A quick glance to the corner of his monitor tells him it's almost midnight. Silence fills his speakers, and Dream logs out of the server.

"Dream, can I talk to you in channel 4?"

He glances down at discord. "Of course."

Bad calls him separately, and for the first few seconds are tense and quiet.

"Have you... heard from George recently?" He asks.

Dream clenches his hand around his mouse. "No."

"That's understandable. I'm sorry for asking, I'm just worried about him. I popped into his stream the other day, and he's not doing so well, but he doesn't even respond to me when I give him donos. He's ignoring all of us, and I thought if he'll listen to anyone, it'd be you."

"Is that a good idea?" His voice is small, a step above a whisper. "He left a wound behind, and I've barely started healing. I- I can't face him just yet."

"Take your time, Dream. We're all here for you if and when you need it. But it might help both of you to see each other. You can't let wounds like that get infected."

He picks at the mouse buttons. "I'll think about it."

"Thank you. Oh, Rat's whining, guess she wants to go on a walk. I'm glad to hear from you, Clay. And sorry about calling your mom. See you tomorrow?" Bad's voice is hopeful.

"See you tomorrow."

They log off at the same time.

Open Wounds

Chapter Summary

confrontation

The cold shingles of Dream's roof pinch into his back. Lost clouds travel in packs through the sky, streaks of pink and lilac breaking the constant cornflower blue. He makes mindless shapes, tracing bunnies and dragons out of nothing.

Climbing up there was always something he wanted to do as a kid, and he never thought that he can still do it as an adult. His attic has a window that, with a little maneuvering and shitty parkour skills, leads to the roof. Dream had gone up to the attic, wanting to look at the gift George gave him before opening his stream, but got distracted by the idea.

Up there, the world feels bigger. He feels like a kid again, with nothing to worry about but the sky, the roof, and the air. Finally, he can breathe, the suffocating tangle of pain no longer taking up all the space in his head. Dream watches the horizon lighten up and spread paint strokes of different colors as the sun lowers inch by inch. The air smells like pine and cut grass. His lungs sting with the cold afternoon dew.

He raises his arms into the air, flexing and wincing when he curls his healed fingers. Earlier that day, he'd gone to get his cast removed as his three weeks in hell were up. The skin underneath is soft and wrinkled, though now he can get to the itch he hasn't been able to scratch before. Small circled scars dot his knuckles.

Behind his eyes, he sees George's face from vital moments he can't erase. Sleepy eyes. Chlorine on his skin. Soft lips. Angry words exchanged between them. The memories haunt him, ghosts in his peripheral, and sometimes, he wonders if this is all just a drawn out nightmare. He wants to wake up in that hotel bed to George snuggled beside him, still together and unaware of what would become of them.

Dream doesn't know if long term is his end goal. What he feels for George could last another month, or until he's buried. He suspects it'd be the latter. They survived years of repression, they can survive a few more. If he could calculate the chances, make his love quantifiable and map out a way back into his arms, life would be easier. But emotions aren't numbers and statistics. He can't code that same want into his friend.

His emotions came and went, George said so himself. Dream had been pushy, disregarding consequences that have come to fruition, and instead cared only about his blooming desire, a fire that he let grow and engulf him. If he'd stopped to think about anyone else other than himself, get out of his inflated head, he would've realized how bad of an idea that was. How dangerous wildfire can be without restraint.

From beneath him, he hears Patches meowing in annoyance, her paws scratching at the living room window. He sighs, sitting up and making his way back inside. His mission lies discarded on the first floor, still in its plastic bag. Dream closes the attic door and picks it up, leaving it on his kitchen counter before heading back to his desk.

He has Twitch pulled up, not expecting George to be streaming anytime soon. He knows everyone can see he's online, and he wonders what would happen if he just went live right now, but he isn't ready for that yet. Maybe he'll ask Sapnap to convince him later on, he misses talking to his fans and he's run out of pre-recorded videos to post.

GeorgeNotFound started streaming two hours ago.

After a few minutes of intense staring, he finally registers the words on his screen. His heart leaps from his chest to the back of his throat, heartbeat pounding in his head. He isn't ready; he doesn't want to see his face yet, if he has his facecam on at all. George won't want to see him. It'll ruin the mood of the stream.

Dream joins anyways.

George's camera is on, showing the usual setup behind him, with one minor difference of what Dream had assumed he'd see. The hickeys are almost entirely gone now. Dream can hardly see them, even as he squints. His eyes, dark and cold, have dark crevices underneath them. He looks ghostly, no color in his cheeks at all, and his lips are chapped and bloody. Despite this, he smiles, cheerily speaking to the influx of chat messages.

“Oh, come on, give me some slack with these questions, I’m not that smart.”

Dream leans in close, reading the chat. He knows it's not odd to watch the facecam, but a small part of him fears that somehow, George will know. Some try to alert George of his presence, but their messages get swallowed by the people sending heart emojis and asking where he's going.

“Alright, no more kahoot.” George claps his hands. “I haven’t been on the SMP for a while, why don’t we go and see if—”

His eyes widen as he stares at the screen. Dream types frantically before his attention diverts.

hello :)

He can't think of anything else to say. The moment George reads it, his eyes go to the camera, and a shiver strikes through his bones.

“Dream?”

His voice is a hair above a whisper.

The chat erupts.

*omg dream is here??
he's alive!
have they not talked?
why is george acting so weird lol
now we know who gave George all those hickeys*

This is a mistake. It's still too soon. George isn't ready. Dream isn't ready. He hovers his mouse over the x on the tab, hand gripping his forearm.

Before he can exit, the screen goes black.

GeorgeNotFound has ended the stream.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!”

Dream’s nails dig into the soft flesh. A sudden rush of pain floods his blood, and he slams his fists down. Pain twinges up his bad hand at the sudden, violent movement as he sweeps them across his desk, knocking off his keyboard, mouse, and a variety of other things he hadn’t cleaned away. The wires connecting his things to the PC snap out of place, unplugging and making his monitor shut off.

The Christmas dinner leftovers he ate for lunch stirs nauseatingly in his stomach. He feels sick with fear. His ribs collapse inwards, squeezing the air out of his lungs.

Before he can crawl into the bathroom to let himself melt away, he hears the familiar chime of his landline from outside his bedroom. Dream doesn’t even need to check the caller ID; he knows who’s calling. A stream of light from outside gives him enough bearing to stand and rush to the kitchen, tripping over his feet. He picks the phone up before the last ring.

When he answers, neither of them speak. The background noise coming in through his headphones is cold water on his burning chest. He’s there. He’s really there. George breathes, hitching every now and then, like he’s trying to decide whether or not to speak. Dream focuses on that noise, steady but close to breaking. His stomach churns painfully, but the nausea ebbs away as he takes deep breaths.

“*It’s been weeks.*” His voice cracks the moment he speaks.

Dream sinks to the ground, pulling his legs to his chest. “I know.”

“*I tried calling.*”

“My phone’s broken.” Knees hold up his head. “I haven’t gotten it fixed.”

A soft mewling comes from behind him. Dream lets his eyes close.

“I missed you,” he says.

George’s breathing pauses.

“*You should hate me, Clay.*”

“Believe me, I really want to. You gave me all the reason to. But I can’t.”

“*That makes me feel worse.*”

Dream grimaces. “Why- why would you say all those things? They cut through me, leaving me to bleed out. And you didn’t even seem to regret it. Didn’t you know they’d hurt me?”

“*I’m...*”

“You might as well have just taken me out of my misery. Maybe you *did* kill me. Now I’m just a ghost in my own house.”

George makes a sound like he was punched in the gut. “*Clay.*”

“You haunt me, George.”

He swears he hears crying on the other end. Shame gnaws at his muscles.

“There’s no excuse for what I said. I- I was angry and afraid. There was a storm in my stomach, and I didn’t know what to do, and I exploded.”

George sighs, airy and broken.

“I know sorry isn’t enough, but I won’t stop saying it until you’re tired of hearing my voice.”

“I’ll never be tired of your voice.”

He checks to make sure his setting fingers haven’t been disturbed inside his cast, hands shaking around the phone.

“I want to be angry, I really do. I want to scream and yell and tell you that I never want to talk to you again. But I can’t, I’ve run out of things to feel,” Dream says.

“Me too. My body is just numb now. But... I finally found the words,” George whispers. *“For when we made it here.”*

Anticipation compresses his chest. “And?”

He mutters incoherently, like he’s choking on his sentences.

“Fuck. And now that I want to say them, I can’t. They keep getting stuck in my throat. I wrote them on the card in case this happened. I know how pathetic this must sound. I’m still afraid.”

“What are you afraid of, George?” He can’t stop the pain from dripping into his voice. “Are you afraid of people knowing? Of stupid fucking consequences? You know the fans won’t care, and you know our friends won’t care. And if you still want to keep it a secret, I’m okay with that. We can hide for weeks, or forever. I could care less. We can hide together.”

“That’s not what scared me. I was scared because I thought it wouldn’t last. I was afraid my want was nothing more than obsession. You don’t understand, Clay. Ever since we met, I worshipped the ground you walked on. In my eyes, you were nothing less than divine. You were my sun. I looked up to you, revolved around you, and in return you gave me light. And I knew that wasn’t healthy. I knew I couldn’t build myself around your image. I needed time to make sure this was real and not a fluke.”

Dream waits patiently for him to continue.

“And just like I thought, my feelings passed as we got closer. And I was okay with that. I was content with you just being in my life, I didn’t need you to be anything more than a friend. But then.... We met. When I saw you in the airport, in person for the first time, it all came back. And then you said you felt the same way. That’s when I realized I hadn’t let go of my feelings, I pushed them down, I let them fester and rot until it was overgrown with fear.”

“So, you...”

“I do. It’s still there, but I need to weed out the fear. And if you’re willing, we can try again.”

He thought he’d be ecstatic to hear those words, but Dream only feels an aching deep in his bones. “George, I... I gave myself time, and I gave *us* time. But I might need a little more.”

“That’s okay. I- I want everything that happens next to be on your terms.”

Dream can’t help but snort, giggles escaping him. George joins him, albeit sounding confused, and

asks him why he's laughing.

"It's just ironic. My mom was right, we've been going in circles. I push you, then pull back out of fear, and then you do the same."

"*Your mom?*" He inquires.

"Yeah. Long story. Look, I know I said that I was ready. But, I think we need to talk first."

"*About what?*"

"About everything. Not just the fight, not just about that week, we need to air all of it out. Every open wound we left to fester."

"*That's scary. And in the end?*"

"I don't know. We'll cross that bridge later."

George's voice goes hot with panic. "*You sound like you're getting closure.*"

"Yeah, well, I assumed that fight was going to be the end of us, I was preparing myself to never speak to you again." Dream grunts as a shot of pain runs up his arm. "Shit. I need to go to anger management."

"*What's wrong?*" George asks.

"Oh, I broke my hand." He says it so nonchalantly he almost laughs again.

"*You what?*"

He does laugh. "Like I said, we have a lot of talk about it."

Patches meows again to get his attention, bopping her head against his calf.

George's voice vibrates against the receiver. "*After everything I said, I'm surprised you even joined the stream.*"

"Honestly, I would've done so earlier, but I was too busy blaming myself," Dream replies.

"*For what? The fight was my fault.*"

"It was both of us. I thought I pressured you into thinking you wanted me. I try to be a good person, to be genuine and kind, but sometimes I can manipulate people without even knowing it." He gently traces the get well soon wishes his sisters wrote on his cast. "That's what I thought I was doing, but my mom knocked some sense into me. She thinks we're meant for each other."

George chuckles. "*I hope she's right. I... I don't know why I thought forgetting would be healthier than just letting it happen.*"

"I get it. I was moving too fast, breaking down too many walls. I was too caught up in this storm of resurging emotions that I forgot to check if we were on the same page."

"*I guess we both made assumptions.*" His laugh dies into a sigh.

Despite the finality of their words, they spend the rest of the night on the phone together, catching up on what they missed during their weeks apart. George cries. So does Dream. He wishes he'd

done this earlier, but knows that the timing wasn't right.

Just like him, George has been a mess. The fans were right to be worried, as he didn't change his clothes the first three days after going home, and could hardly get himself to do anything else. If it weren't for his new pets, he wouldn't have left bed.

Dream laughs, because even when they weren't on speaking terms, they paralleled each other. He tries to imagine George grieving the way he did. Standing under the shower until the water turned tepid. Staring at his omelet as it burnt black. It's hard to see, but his voice is intermingled with honest embarrassment.

Another break comes when they both hit moments they can't relive. Dream tries to explain how he broke not one, but two fingers, though he stops once the tears threaten their encore. George goes dead silent when Dream asks why he streamed with hickeys.

They sit, across the world but at each other's side, airing out their open wounds to give them a chance to finally close.

George's voice comes near silent, like it was a thought that didn't mean to escape the consciousness. "*C lay, when you said I destroy and rebuild you, you were telling the truth, yes?*"

Dream's body turns into marble, still and cold. "I was."

"... *What an awful person to be in love with.*"

Before Dream can reply and tell him he's wrong, George asks him another question.

"*Did I-*" he clears his throat, and Dream can hear the tears in his throat. "*Did I ruin us?*"

He shakes his head before remembering George can't see him. "No, of course not. But... the hotel wasn't the right time or place for us. We need more time."

"*I agree. But I don't want more time to be the rest of our lives.*"

Dream scratches Patches behind the ears. "It won't, don't worry. I'm too irresistible." He smiles at George's scoff. "It'll be awhile until we see each other in person again, so don't push yourself too hard."

"*I won't, as long as you don't either.*"

"No promises.

The two sit in the comfort of each other's silence. If he shuts his eyes tight enough, Dream can imagine George leaning against him, talking right into his ear. Together, not torn apart. "*I miss you.*"

"Can you say it again?"

"*What, I miss you?*"

"Yeah." Dream runs his knuckles against his forehead, up and down. "It's nice to hear."

"*I miss you. I've missed you since the day I drove you away. Dream, I've never felt this way for anyone before, and it terrifies me.*" His breathing stutters as he speaks again. "*But not loving you scares me even more.*"

Salt tickles at Dream's lips. He swipes the tears away.

"You have no idea how happy those words make me," he says, voice high and close to shattering.

George sniffs, a breathy sob making it to his ears.

Acidic regret crawls along the back of his throat. "I know I don't act like it, but I'm scared too."

"*Really? What are you scared of?*" George asks.

"That if we cross this bridge, it'll still burn in the future. I've never been long term. You know that. But you- I can see decades of me and you. And that's a lot scarier to think of, possibilities of forever when forever is rare."

"I thought crossing this bridge would be the end of us, and I was being selfish by sparing my feelings at the expense of yours."

Patches nibbles his elbow, gets bored, and leaves.

Their fears are a lot similar than Dream thought. The end of their love before it even begins. The destruction of their future lives. Is it really worth the gamble, making this work? Will they be able to make it work? They've had issues with communication before. Who's to say that won't happen again, but worse? What's stopping them from destroying each other?

George sighs out a swear and rustling comes through the receiver. Dream cradles the phone, his only connection.

"Look at us, we're talking. Communicating. This is healthy," Dream says, earning a snort from George. "Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me these things."

"*I'm sorry I didn't trust you enough to tell you all of this sooner,*" he replies.

"You trust me now. That's what I care about."

Gracious Welcome

Chapter Summary

manhunt

Chapter Notes

sorry if it seems like there's a bunch of hw references in this
I swear they're not intentional I wrote a lot of these chapters in advance
anyways chapter twelve was just *chefs kiss*

Ever the man of making impulsive decisions, Dream makes the choice to stop depriving his fans of content on New Years Eve . Just because he's still in a funk doesn't mean he can put them down as well, and he knows a healthy distraction will do him good. He asks Sapnap and Bad to join him, in case he can't answer the questions he's bound to get. They cheerfully agree, and with shaky hands, he starts the stream.

Immediately, floods of worried and elated fans come in. He greets them in an upbeat tone that he doesn't need to force, happy to be back into the routine. The glimmer of normalcy is gracious and welcome. Most of the dono questions he manages to answer as vaguely and Dream-esque as possible. Others, he lets Sapnap or Bad take the reins for.

It's odd for him, not being in full control of everything around him, and inklings of terror seep in when he crosses something he can't find it in himself to respond to. He's not one to be vulnerable. His fate has always been only in his own hands, easily manipulated and outside of anyone else's power. Giving his full, albeit hesitant, trust to anyone other than himself is hard, but it's a step in the right direction. No more unshared weight on his shoulders.

Dream takes a deep breath and willingly hands control to his friends, knowing they won't take advantage of his vulnerability.

As their server loads, they talk about their plans for the day.

“So, what's on the schedule, boys?” Bad asks.

“I actually didn't have anything planned for today,” Dream says, not bothering to repress the smile in his voice. “I'm down for anything, really.”

He presses shift, dull throbbing in his pinky causing him to hiss in pain. “Ow. Guess I can't crouch today, fellas.”

“Is it ‘cause of your hand? Did you tell chat what happened?” Bad hits the air.

“Not yet. Long story short, I broke my hand.”

Chat bombards him with a new wave of confusion.

“I’m fine, guys, don’t worry. I got the cast removed yesterday, but I have to wear a splint until I start going to physical therapy.”

“*You have to go to physical therapy for it?*” Sapnap asks, curiosity weakly masking concern.

“I don’t have to, but the doctor recommended it, given my job is to literally play video games, so I signed up for them. I start in a week, I think.”

“*Karl and I came up with a different version of manhunt.*” Sapnap’s character hops up and down.

Bad kills a zombie that had been attacking him. “*What was your idea?*”

“*Okay, so Karl and I were brainstorming, and we came up with a cool idea. Two speedrunners versus the hunters, but the two speedrunners are also racing against each other to beat the ender dragon, so they’re not on the same team.*”

“*Oh, that sounds fun! What do you think, Dream?*”

Dream hums a bit. “I don’t think I’ve ever streamed a manhunt before. I dig it. Who would be the other speedrunner?”

“*I dunno, wanna do rock, paper scissors for it?*”

“How about Illumina?” He suggests. “Wait, nevermind, he’s way too good, I actually want a chance to win. Techno?”

“*I think Techno would be down,*” Sapnap says . “*But he might just get distracted killing us all instead of trying to win.*”

“Yeah, but he’d be fun to play with. I’ll message him.” He pulls his phone out, remembering its dead state, and slips it back into his hoodie pocket. “Whoops, forgot my phone is broken. Can someone else message him?”

“*I’ve got it. When are you going to get that fixed?*”

Dream shrugs. “Sometime after New Years.”

The chat, still pouring in questions and get well soons, he notices a fraction of them spamming that George is watching is steam. Dream’s smile slowly fades into a pensive frown.

They’re on speaking turns, but only barely. It’s only been a week. Seeing his name sends his stomach to the floor. He still needs time and space, he needs to live without the constant reminder of their relationship. They both need a life where the other doesn’t exist, so in case things go south, it doesn’t ruin them completely.

From behind him, he hears the landline ringing. “While we wait for Techno, I’m going to get some food. Be right back!”

He sets his headphones on his desk, which he’d set back up after his outburst, and goes to answer the phone. It’s George, voice tumbling to his ears before hello leaves his lips.

“*I’m sorry if I disrupted your stream by joining. It’s habit.*”

For some reason, hearing George stumble leaves warm traces in his cheeks. Dream drums his fingers against the smooth cold counter. “It’s okay.”

“I think I’ll just duck out and let you do your thing.”

A frown tugs at his lips. “George, please stop treating me like I’ll break any second. I’m not glass.”

“I- I didn’t mean to-”

“I get you’re trying to be better, but tip toeing won’t help. You’re not being mean or pushing by doing something normal for once. It’s just difficult, not impossible. We’re going to get through this, but it’s going to take a hell of a lot longer if you keep doing this.”

For a moment, George doesn’t immediately respond, and he wonders if his words are too harsh for the small infraction. Dream hates having to hold George at a distance. He hates being babied just as much. When George finally speaks, his voice is a blade, sharp and cold.

“Right.”

“Okay, I could’ve phrased that better.”

“No, no, I understand. I know I’m overcompensating for my mistakes. But you’re not even trying to mend things. You don’t call me, I always call you. You tell me I’m the one trying to pretend nothing happened when you’re avoiding it too.”

Dream snorts. “Well, it’s not like I was the one who wanted to pretend like we almost didn’t drunk fu-”

“*Not this again,*” George complains.

“Yes, this again. I’m not ignoring it, I promise. But it- it hasn’t been that long. I still need to ease back into a steady schedule of streaming and recording videos before I can even think of going a step higher.”

He sheathes the anger in his voice. *“Okay, that’s fair. Sorry, I’m just a little out of it. We haven’t recorded a video together in a while. Maybe we could... get Sapnap and Bad to do something together off stream.”*

“That sounds like a good idea.” Dream hears his discord pinging. “Just... treat me how you always have. We’re still best friends, even if everything’s changed.”

“I know.” There’s uncertainty in George’s hesitating breath. *“As long as we can just hang out like we used to. I’ve got ideas for new videos.”*

“Sure thing. I’ll call you tonight if that’s okay.”

The hesitation leaves. *“That’s more than okay.”*

He hangs up and returns to his desk, seeing that both Techno and Antfrost have joined them.

“Welcome home, Theseus!” Techno bellows his infamous line as soon as Dream greets them, making the chat go nuts.

Dream giggles, his laugh spreading to the rest of his friends. “Thanks, Techno. It feels good to be back. Should we come up with some rules first, like the other manhunts?”

As they catch up and flesh out their new game, he sees a message on his screen.

Antfrost whispers to you: is george gonna join?

With an ache, he responds, *not this time.*

He reminds himself that things will be better. Maybe not soon, but it will be.

They tweak the compasses so they point to whichever speedrunner is closest to them rather than having it point to one or the other. It should be easier for Dream and Techno, given it's now two versus three. After throwing banter at each other for a few more minutes and setting up their recordings, they begin the game with Dream sprinting off when Bad starts an argument with Sapnap's foul language.

Just like he thought, Techno immediately tries to kill the three hunters. Dream uses the distraction to run into the forest, seeing a spruce village up in the hills. While the others are preoccupied by Techno's bloodlust, he steals as much supplies as he can, getting iron, a pickaxe, a bunch of spruce logs, and two stacks of berries. He also ends up with a dozen pumpkin pies before the others catch up to him.

“Leave me be!” He shouts as he books it for the top of the hill, half of his health down from Bad and Sapnap's assault.

“*Bad, help!*” Antfrost screams as Techno kills him. “*Aw, man.*”

After a small chase, he makes it to the top of the hill, jumping off into a small pond at the bottom. He eats berries while he continues to run, seeing Sapnap's death notification at the corner of his screen. Bad's follows soon behind as Dream lands one last punch.

“*Techno, you're not even trying to beat the game,*” Sapnap complains.

Techno's laugh vibrates Dream's headphones. “*Don't worry, once I kill you all, there'll be nobody left to stop me.*”

“Wait.” He has enough space between him and the hunters to stop running and search for supplies. “Did we say in the rules that Techno and I couldn't kill each other?”

The hesitation in their silence makes Dream groan.

“Okay, new rule- Techno, we can't kill each other until we get to the End.”

“*Aw, come on. That's lame.*”

“It would make this more entertaining. These usually take like four, five hours. A twenty minute manhunt where you immediately kill us all isn't that fun.”

“*... Fine.*”

Dream drops into a ravine just outside of a desert biome, finding veins of coal and iron ore in the walls. He crafts an axe and boots with the iron he found in the village. While his iron smelts, he makes a few buckets and collects water and lava. It's not enough to make a nether portal, but he's got quite a few tricks up his sleeve.

The three hunters catch up to him, and he's able to get away by killing them all in a desert temple. Techno makes a nether portal, and Dream creates his own a moment later, though they're far enough that their paths don't cross. As the hunters chase Techno through a soul sand valley, Antfrost being noticeably absent, Dream slowly makes his way into a nether fortress. Once the

notification of his arrival appears, his headphones erupt into chaotic shouting.

“How the muffin did he get there already?” Bad shrills as Antfrost yelps, dying to lava.

Sapnap’s small figure waddles towards the fortress on a Strider. Dream scrolls to his bow, notching an arrow and firing. His friend screams when it connects to the Strider. He tries to swerve out of his way, but Dream shoots again, hitting Sapnap once and the Strider twice before it’s finally killed.

“Dream!” Sapnap’s roar makes Dream giggle.

He succumbs to the lava as well, leaving Bad the only hunter still in the Nether.

“Man, I wish George was here,” Antfrost mutters playfully. *“Strength in numbers and all that.”*

The call goes quiet. Dream’s eyes impulsively flicker to the chat on impulse, unable to tell if George is still watching, and continues through the fortress in silence. Techno’s taunting dies quickly as Antfrost asks if he said something wrong.

Sapnap clears his throat. “Nah, you’re fine, Ant. Are you getting the stuff?”

“Uh, yeah. Give me a few minutes.”

Dream grinds through the blaze, snatching enough rods before Techno runs into him. Somehow, he has diamond leggings, with everything else being iron. They stare each other down, both crouching and circling around each other before Dream sprints down a hallway. He can already hear the intense music he’ll put in that scene when editing.

As he goes in search of his portal, Dream gets turned around and ends up lost in the basalt delta, hopping over magma blocks and lava pits. Ten minutes of complaining and climbing up to get a better view, he catches sight of a Bastion remnant. He gets in and maneuvers around the brutes, digging through the chests, and finds an enchanted crossbow and spectral arrows. Dream takes the obsidian, some golden pieces of armor, and iron ingots, but leaves the rest behind.

He’s equipping a pair of boots with soul speed when suddenly Sapnap drops from the sky, nearly knocking him into the lava. A scream tears through his throat.

“What?” Dream shouts incredulously. “How did you find me?”

“C’mere, Dream!” Sapnap coos, chasing him through the irritated piglins and back into the dark gray biome.

Bad joins him, both in full iron armor, their weapons enchanted. Dream equips his fishing rod, clicking rapidly at his Strider sitting idly near the fiery lake. He’s able to get it close enough to ride it, but not before Sapnap knocks him into the lava, catching him on fire.

“Please. Please!” He pleads, watching helplessly as his health depletes from the fire damage.

Hyperventilating now, he waddles as far as he can get from the hunters, eating through half of his pumpkin pies in an attempt to keep himself alive. The fire fades when he hits one heart, and Dream throws his arms up. He sees a notification of Sapnap dying from heights.

“Yes!” He lets out a cackle of triumph, hissing in pain and gently curling his fingers. “Ow.”

“Bad, what the muffin!”

“Sorry, I was aiming for the Strider!”

After nearly two hours of wandering the nether, Dream finally finds a portal, but he doesn't believe it's his. He hops through, finding himself in the middle of a meadow. With only two eyes of ender, he tosses one into the air, finding the direction he needs to go for the stronghold.

Four hours into their manhunt, the eye sinks into the ground, and Dream starts digging. He drops into the stronghold. While the hunters explode with confusion at the notification, he farms for ender pearls, mockingly making weak cries of terror alongside them. When he gets enough for the missing slots, a new notification appears.

Technoblade has made the achievement [eye spy].

“What!” Dream frantically plugs the ender eyes into their respective slots. “How?”

Techno’s cackle sends him into a frenzy. Dream preps himself, adjusting the beds in his storage with his axe at the ready. He sees the familiar pink faced avatar appear as he drops into the portal, sending him to the loading screen.

“Yes!” The monitor loads as he gets the achievement if getting to the end.

His victory is short-lived, as a moment later Techno appears in front of him, instantly punting him off the edge of the platform. Dream screams, spamming his ender pearls until one lands, and he has two hearts left as he spawns on the surface, right beside an obsidian tower.

Techno laughs, then pauses. *“How are you not dead?”*

Dream tips his head back in an airy laugh. “Fuck you, Techno!”

“*Language!*” Bad shouts.

The three hunters’ achievements of them entering the stronghold and the end appear close together, so Dream gets to work picking off the crystals. Techno climbs up one side of the tower, Sapnap speedily building after him. Bad and Ant go after Dream, who’s taken out all but three of the crystals as they begin to attack him.

He has one heart left. Dream tosses an ender pearl behind them, eating the remainder of his food to get his health up.

“*Oh, Dream,*” Bad sings. *“Why are you running?”*

Sapnap yelps before dying. Antfrost tosses a dark potion at Dream, he dodges, laughing at his low mewl of disappointment.

“You can’t trick me again, Ant,” he taunts, not paying attention as Bad gets close, smacking him and getting him down to half a heart.

Dream smacks his desk as he nearly dies, sprinting through a hoard of Endermen. He’s normally sly and calm in dire situations, but with the stress and panic he’s been going through the past few weeks, his false demeanor slips.

“Mother f-” he stops himself from swearing.

He kills Ant with a spectral arrow, leading Bad to the edge before knocking him away. Sapnap is still chasing Techno, who’s knocked out the remaining crystals. Dream sprints for the middle as the dragon flies down, ducking down into the fountain and building two blocks. While the two respawn and race back to the end, he plants and blows up the dozen beds he has on him, getting the

dragon dangerously down.

Sapnap yells a war cry at him, smacking him away as the dragon leaves. Dream leans forward into his chair, seeing Techno regaining his high ground on the tallest obsidian pillars. While the three hunters chase him around, Dream puts tnt in his hotbar. With a grin, he starts to tower, waiting until they follow before dropping and lighting the tnt.

The explosions take Bad and Sapnap out, leaving Ant frantic to pick up their remains. Dream drops down with his water and takes Ant out with two easy swipes, burning their stuff with furious success.

Returning to the center, he watches dismay as Techno slays the ender dragon.

The body freezes in the air as the achievement appears. His voice strays far from earshot as he, assumingly, falls out of his chair. Dream screams as his friends do the same. Techno howls his success to the heavens, and they laugh, all going into creative mode once the dragon disappears.

“GG, Techno,” Dream says, hitting him off the edge. “Can’t believe you beat me and the others on your first manhunt with us.”

“*What can I say? I’m a pro,*” is his only reply.

After another half hour of excitedly talking about the close encounters, the new tricks Dream and Techno pulled, and their improvements from the last one, the adrenaline drops. Dream glances at the clock for the first time since beginning.

“Oh, wow, I didn’t know we were playing for so long,” he whistles. “I think I’ll end the stream after reading the donos.”

“*Yeah, I’m going to harass children on the SMP. Sayonara, losers.*” Techno logs off.

Dream zooms through the donos, smiling at the chat that has gone mostly to normal.

“Alright, I’ll see you guys later. Happy New Years!”

“*Happy New Years!*” The other three chime in as he finally ends his stream.

He leans back, sinking into the comfort of his chair. Patches hops into his lap, spinning once before plopping down. Dream scratches the flattened fur under her collar, and she purrs with polite adoration.

“*Okay, can anyone catch me up on the drama I missed?*” Ant asks once they’re all in a private call, no fans to hear. “*Why wasn’t George here, and why did you guys get all weird when I mentioned him? Did something happen?*”

The air reeks with discomfort. Patches chirps as his hands pause their loving pets, getting annoyed quickly and leaving him after a few seconds. Dream stares at his screen, wishing for one of his other friends to retell it.

“*... Was it that bad?*” Ant sounds scared.

“It’s complicated.” Dream chews on his lip, looking for the right words to explain the situation with. Ant isn’t a kid, he shouldn’t treat him like one. He deserves to know.

Sapnap begins the story, and that pushes flood gates to reopen. Dream recants the tragic romance

his life has become, starting from the event at the pool onward. Bad and Sapnap pick up where he leaves off when the words strangle him to silence. Their soft tones, specifically Sapnap trying to crack jokes about their surreality, makes Dream cry all over again.

The memories are scabs in his mind, but explaining doesn't hurt as much as when he told his family just a week earlier. When he scratches the wounds, they merely itch now. They don't beled. That has to be a good thing.

Once they're done, Ant whistles. "*That was... wow. I really did miss a lot.*"

"Yeah," Dream says.

"*Yeah,*" Sapnap echoes.

"*Yeah.*" Bad giggles. "*I wanted to join the yeah train.*"

A smile forces itself across Dream's face. "Yeah."

"Yeah!" Ant joins in.

They repeat the word over and over, getting louder. It doesn't even sound like a real word as they begin to unspool into hysterics, laughter filling Dream's entire world as he falls out of his chair, unplugging his headphones.

He lies on the floor, in tears, and revels in the temporary joy.

Tradition

Chapter Summary

the year starts anew

Chapter Notes

had a covid scare but test came back negative :3c thank GOD
EDIT: sapnap autocorrecting to subpoena will be the death of me

Ten minutes before the ball drops, Dream calls George. It takes a few rings for him to pick up, but he finally does. Both ends have news anchors commentating the night's events filtering in and out of hearing. Dream doesn't want to speak first. He knows George won't.

"Hey," he says.

"Hey," George responds.

The rough edges of his tired voice cut into Dream's skin. He sounds nervous, like he always does now, though it's not as tense as before. Dream doesn't want George to tiptoe around him because he's afraid of hurting him a second time, though he knows it's not an automatic fix. Some part of him knows normality was impossible the moment this all started.

Maybe that's the problem. Dream is hellbent on making normal work again, but the only way to do so is to forget, and he doesn't want to do that either. Consolation of the past and future uncertainty tips the balance of his life back and forth, a seesaw of fear and want. The swaying makes him feel sick. Up, when his friends' laughter is the center of his world. Down, when he remembers that he doesn't have complete movement of his fingers yet.

He mentally groans, pushing down his worries in favor of enjoying the company of his friend.

Friend. The word is acrid in his mind.

"It's almost the New Year." Dream lowers the volume of his TV, drinking whatever remains in his champagne glass. The alcohol leaves warm traces of comfort through his chest and down to his toes. "What time is it over there?"

"Almost five."

"Oh, wow. How long have you been awake?"

"*I fell asleep after watching the clock change.*"

Dream chuckles softly. "Sorry for waking you."

George lets out a small groan as he shifts positions. "*Don't be. We spend every New Year on the*

phone together. I don't wanna mess with tradition."

He hums softly in response, sliding down until he's lying flat against the couch, his view of his television partially blocked by Patches lying on the coffee table. The glass hangs vicariously from between his fingers, empty so he doesn't fear spilling it on the carpet. Dream wishes he was there with him, and tells him as much.

"I don't like the fireworks," George complains. *"They're too loud."*

"Yeah, but they're pretty! Not like you could see the colors anyways."

"Says you, the one who hardly leaves his house."

"Meanie."

Someone screams outside, and Dream hears the telltale sign of a Roman candle hitting a car. He knew that sound too well from his youth, along with the parental scolding that would always come after.

When George speaks again, he hears his new kitten meow in the background. *"Dream, I have a question."*

The nervous energy in his voice makes Dream empty his glass. *"What is it?"*

"Did you ever open up that card I gave you?" Cat meows again, longer and more persistent.

"No, I haven't. Would you like me to now?"

"No. It's... it's a lot." George's elongated sigh turns into a groan. *"It's all the things I wanted to tell you before that I couldn't. But now, I guess... we've talked about everything, so it doesn't really matter if you read it or not."*

He chuckles, but it falls flat on their ears. Dream flops onto his bare stomach, filling his glass and returning to his previous position. Despite his shirtless state, he's warm, bubbly, a glass of room temperature champagne. The sour mood is hilarious to him, but makes him want to hang up to cut the feeling short.

What could be in the letter that George hasn't already told him? Almost everything's already been exposed. They bore their hearts out to each other, more than they had ever done before, and he assumed that there was nothing else new to say. If there's more, Dream wants to know. He needs to know. His impulsive need to go scrambling for it immediately is squelched by the anxious pitch in his friend's voice.

Later, he tells himself. Neither of us are ready.

"I'll open it later," he promises, drinking the champagne like a shot. The dry sting of alcohol on his throat gives him a full body shiver. *"I'm still... yeah."*

"Do it whenever. I don't really want to be on the phone when you open it, anyways."

Five minutes left. Patches jumps when someone down the street lights a firework, the high pitched whistle filling the background. Dream scoops her up and holds her to his chest. The purring sends tidal waves of love through him. He listens to George's television on the other line, recanting the countdown as well.

“This year has been...”

“Yeah,” George concludes.

“Yeah.”

“*What are your New Year's resolutions?*”

To see you in person again. “Hit twenty million, I guess. Yours?”

“*Win death swap for once.*”

Dream chuckles, scratching Patches under her chin. He moves to his side so he has a clear few of the timer counting down. The liquor is warm honey in his abdomen, courage filling up his chest with a bubbling giggle. George must be as buzzed as he is, because he joins in with his own soft butterfly laughter.

When it finally dies down, Dream’s nearly forgotten about why they stopped talking in the first place. They don’t speak for the last remaining minutes of the year. George’s breathing is gentle and timed with his own, a united synchronization across continents.

“If we hadn’t fought, would you have come home with me?” Dream asks.

George clicks his tongue a few times. “*I... I don’t know. I would be too scared to, I think.*”

“Even if I asked nicely?”

“*What, you’re gonna say pretty please? Like that’s gonna make me change my mind.*”

He pauses, staring at as the clock hits ten seconds.

“George.”

“*Dream.*”

Nine.

“Do you regret it?”

George’s breathing gets caught on surprise. “*Regret what?*”

Eight.

“The fight.”

Seven.

Dream pours himself a fourth glass.

“*Of course I do.*” Six. “*But like you said, it wasn’t the right time.*”

Five.

“When will it be the right time?”

Four.

“That’s up to us, I suppose.”

Three.

“Do you think we’re ready?”

Two.

“I don’t know. I don’t fucking know anything anymore.”

One.

“I want to see you again.”

The implication in his voice is clear. As those words leave his lips, the ball plummets downwards on his television. Outside of Dream’s window, the sky explodes with violent colors. George gasps, springs creaking, and sputters before words come out. The first few seconds of the new year tick by as Dream tries to be patient. He vibrates with eager, drunken anticipation.

“*You’re kidding,*” George finally says.

“No.” Dream’s lips twitch at the cocktail of fear and excitement in his voice, the same in his own. “I’m not.”

“*You’re drunk.*”

“So are you.”

“*Yeah, but...*” George pauses. Dream wonders if he’s asking too much too soon. “*Is this the time to talk about this?*”

Deja vu hits him. “If I could just... hold you one more time, then I’d know. By the time you come, anyways, I think I’ll have had enough time to think over everything.” He waits for him to respond, but continues when he doesn’t get one. “Are- are you okay?”

“*God, yes. Wait. No. I’m- I’m fucking terrified, Dream.*”

“Me too.”

Patches, now full of affection, hops off the couch and putters away. The news anchor’s speech is drowned out by the high pitched whistles of fireworks. Dream sets his glass down and closes his eyes, pressing his spine into the back pillows. He pretends the cushions are George, that they’re cuddling and warm and happy. It’s pathetic, how much he wants him.

“When would you want to come?” He asks.

“*Oh, uh, can I have a raincheck on that? I need to think about it.*”

“Yeah, no pressure, dude.”

“*I bet it’s cold over there, too.*”

“You live in England, and you can’t handle the cold? Weak.”

“*Shut up, Florida man. Why don’t you go eat some crocodiles or something?*”

Dream laughs so hard he rolls onto his hand, wincing in pain. George's laughter pauses when he swears under his breath.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, just my hand. Now that I’ve got the cast off, I keep forgetting that they’re still healing.”

“*Oh.*” More fireworks fill their pauses. “*You never told me how you broke it.*”

Despite anticipating his question, Dream flinches. There were still gaps in their communication, details left out and events unmentioned. He doesn’t want to revisit that moment in the stairwell. The helplessness and agony he was in would’ve devoured him if not for Bad’s intervention, and even then it left him paralyzed for weeks. Telling that story would tear that scab off.

“How about I tell you when you visit,” Dream says, “and you can tell me why you kept streaming even when, hello- hickeys. Deal?”

Compromise.

“... Deal. Would you want Sapnap or Bad to be there?”

Dream scratches his neck. “It would be nice to see them, but I don’t think they want to third and fourth wheel again.”

“*Yeah, fair enough,*” George says, chuckling. “*We should really have a vacation do-over.*”

“We could go visit one of them. Just book flights to Texas or something without telling anyone, make Sapnap pick us up from the airport.”

“I’ll fly over to you, and we can drive up to Bad’s place. Wait, is he really living with Zak?”

“Yeah, but I dunno why on earth they decided on Florida instead of Cali.”

Dream’s eyes have permanently sealed, the only working part of his brain fixated on George’s soft laughter.

“Probably because it’s not on fire. It was California on fire, right?”

“Australia,” he slurs. “Wait, no, you’re right. It was California, too.”

The liquor lulls him to half-consciousness. Dream continues to speak, but the words turn into humming in his head as sleep takes him for its own.

--

January smells like cherries and burnt cardboard. The rain hurts against Dream’s shoulders. It stings his clothed skin with cold kisses, plinking against the roof around him and rushing down the gutters. He doesn’t tell the difference between the drizzle and his tears,

His neighbor’s kids a few houses down hop in the freshly made puddles. He misses his sisters on days like this. Dream used to splash them with the rainwater that pooled in uneven crevices of their childhood street. They hated it when he and their brother ganged up on them to soak them, and Mom would always scold them for getting water in their boots. The mornings after, they’d all have colds, but Dream didn’t care.

Stagnancy leads nowhere. Taking risks give good and bad in equal parts.

Dream rubs his knuckles, wounds closed but still pink with reminder. His fingers still hurt sometimes. They ache as he curls them around the small journal his new therapist had gifted him for their first session.

Despite having gone before for his ADHD diagnosis, returning to therapy terrified him. Now he's not just a lonely kid with an attitude problem and a distaste for rules. He's an adult, one who has a career and a home and an ocean's worth of untouched issues. The thought of having to go over it all over again, and more, was something he wasn't sure he wanted to do. Mom ended up being to one to book the times for him. She found a few local therapists and scheduled the appointments to see which one he liked the most.

The first two don't go too well, but the third therapist was nice enough. Dr. Warner reminds Dream of Bad, kind and thoughtful. He talks slowly, threading his words with careful intricacy, and Dream is jealous of his patience. Although he didn't get straight into everything bothering him, he knows time will help him crack open. It's scary, but he knows it will be okay.

He tucks the notebook into his hoodie pocket to protect it from the rain and goes back inside, determined to get some things done around the house before his sister visits.

He empties out the dishes he forgot in the washer for nearly two weeks. Streams of gray ribbons shine in through his open windows, thick clusters of charcoal clouds covering the sun. Florida's weekly rainstorm comes in harsher than normal.

Dream picks up a mug and sniffs it, recoiling at the old coffee smell.

“You know what, Patches?” He looks down at his fury companion, who busies herself nipping at her paw. “I’m just gonna run it again. I won’t forget it this time.”

He makes spaghetti and meatballs, undercooking the noodles and overcooking the rest, but it’s not the worst thing he’s ever eaten. His sister doesn’t seem to care, though she teases his feeble attempt at Italian food.

“Olive Garden, you better back off,” she says, losing her mind in laughter when he frustratingly chugs his Sprite.

“Shut up, Dris,” he grumbles, “or I’m gonna tell Tommy you have a crush on him.”

“No!”

--

Valentine’s day is around the corner. The thought of spending it alone has never bothered him before. Dream enjoyed the discounted candy the day after and hanging with his friends on call, watching shitty romantic comedies or playing games.

However, his mind is plagued with the different paths he could’ve been on. Dream forces himself not to imagine George curled up on the couch with him, head in his lap. He avoids thoughts of making breakfast with him, spending the night just talking about whatever they want. He most definitely steers clear of George’s body shivering with anticipation underneath him, fingertip bruises imprinted into his hips. The temptation is always there, always presence in the back of his mind. A door he refuses to open.

The call starts awkward at first, with the tense quiet settling before Sapnap asks about the first movie they chose. Dream picks up the chatter once they get started, George’s chuckle at his jokes giving him confidence. Soon, Bad joins, and eventually so does George.

“Do people actually like this shit?” Sapnap boos at one of the kissing scenes.

“I mean, mostly teenage girls,” George gets out between breathy giggles.

Bad futilely tries to defend it, but he can’t stop laughing. *“It’s not as bad as the first one, what was it called, Work It Out?”*

Dream stuffs his mouth with popcorn to stop himself from wheezing. *“They’re both trash.”*

They get three movies in, and suddenly, there’s a fourth participant.

“Skeppy!” Sapnap shouts enough to shake Dream’s laptop. *“What the muffin? You didn’t tell us you guys were dating!”*

“Sorry, guys, didn’t mean to keep you in the dark,” Skeppy says, though he doesn’t sound it.

“Uh huh, sure,” Dream drawls with playful skepticism. *“So, when’s the wedding?”*

Bad chokes on his soda. *“W- Dream!”*

“I mean, everyone saw you two coming,” George adds.

“Oh, look who’s talking, a dreamnotfound fanfiction crashed a whole website!”

They pause, followed by an onslaught of hysterics. Dream’s lungs burn as he wheezes to high heaven, slamming his feet on the ground in an attempt to catch his breath. Sapnap has to mute himself, he’s so loud, and George’s laugh sounds like glorious trumpets in his ears. He flaps his hands out to calm himself. Even Skeppy joins in.

When they calm down, they’ve missed twenty minutes of the movie, but they weren’t paying attention anyways.

Bad leaves the call early to have dinner with Skeppy, and George goes to sleep, though he stays online.

Sapnap and Dream get ten minutes into their fourth cringe inducing film.

“Hey, Sap,” Dream says.

“What’s up?”

“Do you think...” he coughs, unsure whether he wants to risk George hearing this. He’s been asleep for almost an hour, so he should be okay. *“Do you think George and I could be like Bad and Skeppy?”*

“Like what? Living together?”

“Happy, I mean. They actually talk about things, and I know Bad’s a lot more understanding than I am, but... do you think we have a chance at having that happiness?”

On Sapnap’s end, the movie pauses, and he doesn’t respond for a few moments.

“I think... it’ll take more time than it took them. Bad and Skeppy were unaware of their feelings at first, so they never had time to repress it like you guys did. They had an easier transition into it. That- that doesn’t mean your route is impossible.”

Dream pauses the movie as well. “I feel like we destroyed so much of each other, and it’s taking too long to search through the rubble for pieces worth keeping. I want to just jump in, be impulsive, not care about consequences. I never even thought about consequences before. Like, what happens if we *do* date? How long will we last? Two months, two years, marriage, whatever? I-”

He sighs, forcing his sweaty hands to flatten against his thighs.

“Now you sound like George,” Sapnap jokes. “You worry too much. Seriously, though, who cares how long it’ll take? George isn’t going anywhere. We’re not going anywhere. Take the time you need to... do your metaphorical cleanup. You’re both doing great so far. I mean, you’re streaming again, and George actually joined the call instead of bailing like usual.”

Before, Dream would say he never cried. He was anger-oriented, because it was the easiest way to drain emotion out.

The tears come regardless.

Sacrament

Chapter Summary

pull the pin

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

March comes with ecstasy highs and come-down lows.

Sometimes, he gets so angry it hurts. It's brought on by stupid little things that reminds him of that night. Memories of the fight bubble up to the forefront of his mind, despite knowing that they're resolving it together. Their progress so far disappears, and the same empty chest cavity pain from the stairwell sends him back into that blind, inconsolable rage. He loses himself in George's cutting voice, dead shark eyes, and dismissive tone. Dream remembers how he felt, how he hurt, and how there was no one there. Cold darkness, a suffocating blanket. Nothing but pain, burning tears, throbbing fists, shredded throat, screaming heart.

His mind empties of all thought except the pounding of his heart, and when he comes to, he leaves wreckage behind. He breaks two coffee mugs by hurling them at the wall, and cuts his thigh open after collapsing in the wreckage as the high of rage slips away. Somehow, he manages not to punch a wall, fearing another broken hand, but he gets low on fancy dishware.

It gets bad enough to scare himself, and his beloved feline friend. After one particularly bad day of screaming until his lungs gave out, Dream throws his kitchen chair to the floor, snapping one of the legs and narrowly missing a collision with a passing Patches. Terrified of the close call, she hides in a cabinet between pots and pans, fur fluffed up and pupils razor thin. After dropping back to reality, he coaxes her out with a bowl of cat treats.

“I- I’m sorry, baby,” he manages through sobs as she finally hops into his arms. “I’m so, so sorry, I promise I won’t do it again.”

Dream holds her as close as he can, not letting her go until she claws her way out of his unrelenting embrace. She forgives him, munching on the Temptations used to lure her out.

When the anger finally fades, he allows himself to feel. Guilt is a rough hand to shake with, but he knows that it's irrational. Shame doesn't stick around too long. Fear lingers, quiet and deadly under his normally impulsive desires. He never had a good relationship with sadness, so he drags his feet and forces himself to focus on anything but the pressure building behind his eyes, ready to burst at any moment.

Seeing Patches afraid of him, so much so that she hides from him, the glass dam of his composure shatters, and he disintegrates into nothing. Dream lies on the floor long after she leaves him for other things to do, and he cries. The tears boil him alive as they trail down his cheeks. He can't do anything else, can't feel anything else. His body is paralyzed by the overwhelming crashing of everything he didn't allow himself to feel before.

The twilight steals all of the light from the kitchen, but he stays there, immobile, drowning in the

waves of horror from his own actions.

--

“Anger management?” George inquires during a game of bed wars, surprise in his voice.

“Yeah.” Dream picks at the foam of his mousepad. “I’ve always had issues as a kid with controlling my anger, but it’s been getting really bad lately. Like, I haven’t been this bad since high school. I talked to my therapist about it, and he gave me some advice and a card for group therapy. It’s a zoom call thing.”

“Oh. I never took you for the violent type.”

“Me neither. But things change, I guess.”

Not always for the better.

--

Sometimes, Dream fixates on the what ifs.

What if he’d kissed George in the pool?

What if they never fought?

What if they’d had sex that night?

The fear of how worse off they’d both be if they’d actually gone through drunk fucking is worse than the possibility of a potential relationship gone wrong. Dream knows if that same fight had happened after having sex, the damage would be irreparable. That was something neither of them would ever forgive themselves for. So, maybe they did do something right, amidst all the wrong.

His therapist likes to focus on the good things that happened, not the bad.

“The steps forward you took are not outshined by your mistakes,” he says. “Remember that they’re equally important. You should try writing them down. It’ll help physically seeing the good and bad.”

Dream takes the advice to heart. He makes the first list easily.

Meeting his friends for his first time. The museum tours. Hide and seek. Tag. The arcade. Bad and Sapnap’s fighting. The park. Boba. Taking pictures at the memorial. George’s laugh. Kissing George. Holding George.

The second list is harder to write, but not as much as he assumed.

Blackout. Not taking his friends’ advice. Missing his chances. Jerking off to George. Kissing George. The fight. Breaking his hand. The flight home. Ignoring him.

There were good things too, and they did outweigh the bad.

Good things.

They’re not quite there yet. Dream knows. He wants to be okay again now that he and George are on talking terms again, but it’s not that easy.

On the better days, their conversations act like balm, gentle and soothing against his mending body. Streams are fun, not a career-driven burden. His jokes land easily, and the urges to start prying bricks from the wall command his actions as they get close again. He feels at home in the warm sunlight that blankets his roof.

However, on the bad days, George's voice is an arrow, trapped between his vertebrae, just out of reach. Try as he might, the struggle and perseverance leaves him worse off. Those days are the ones when he refuses calls and games. Sapnap and Bad leave the door open for him whenever he needs it, and George is overwhelmingly kind.

George has those days too. Not as often, but Dream notices when they come along. The strung out silence when he moves the landline to the couch, just to pay attention for any whispers that could slip from his awareness. Sometimes, George asks questions sometimes that make Dream wonder if he was taking this worse than he lets one. Dream is normally transparent about his feelings, but George keeps his heart locked away in a vault. n

They both feel guilty, but their dichotomy of fault was evident, even to them. Dream was motivated by hope. George was fueled by fear. As much as he hates to admit it, the heavy parts of their broken walls fall onto his shoulders.

There's nothing they can do besides put the pieces together as best as they can.

--

While Dream loves playing games with his friends for a living, he hates having to change his barely existing sleep schedule because of time zone differences. The routine of early mornings and late nights is familiar, but he despises it. However, it gives him chances to catch the sun rising. He sends George's pictures of the watercolor landscape for him to wake up to.

Dream waits for his coffee to make and bagel bites to heat up one morning, he wanders up to the roof, newly fixed phone in hand, checking his discord to see any new messages.

Their group chat has been spammed to high heaven, and it takes a few seconds of scrolling to understand why.

George. It's George. He'd responded to Wilbur's invitation to play Among Us earlier that morning (afternoon for them), and that sent everyone else in their chat into a frenzy of welcoming him back after his near month of silence. It's been his first appearance outside of the Dream Team since their arrival, so the SMP members revel in his presence. They spend the morning catching up, spamming each other with memes, and assuring George that they missed him. For a moment, Dream sees a glimmer of the past in the ongoing conversation.

He watches new messages bubble up and adds his own. More come flooding in, surprised that he and George are there at the same time.

They end up playing Among Us for the entire afternoon, and soon Dream forgets about their silent rule of giving each other space.

That day is a good day.

It's added to the list.

--

They passed the stage of putting pieces back together. What's left of their open wounds are only

scars now, peach colored blotches on his tan knuckles, a reminder of where he was, where he is now, and where he can go from there. Things aren't perfect, but they never really were to begin with. Back when they both pretended that they weren't hopelessly in love with each other, it was just easier. Dream likes the new challenge. The pain never leaves, and he's okay with that.

It takes time, but he eventually makes peace with the fight. Dream knows why they fought, what drove them to say those things, the fears that will continue to linger after their amends, and knows it doesn't dictate the rest of his life.

The temperature reaches the high seventies, so Dream drives to Tampa in pursuit of something he can't grasp just yet. Warm wind ruffles his shirt, tunneling between the tall palm trees lining the entrance. Sea spray and sand tickles his face. A few families dot the beach, spaced out enough that Dream can plop down with his towel and wait for his friends without disturbing others and breaking social distancing laws.

He's been ignoring the card's presence. It sat untouched in his kitchen drawer for months, the last loose thread hanging between him and whatever the future holds. Now, it burns a hole in the pocket of his swim trunk. Opening it will be either the end of everything or the beginning of something new. The chances both exhilarate and terrify him.

Bad and Skeppy arrive as he finishes covering himself with sunscreen, dragging a cooler and picnic basket behind them. They hold hands like they're the only things keeping each other on earth. If they let go, they'll float away. Skeppy waves to get his attention.

After an exchange of joyous greetings and an extra long hug from Bad, they set up their basket of lunches and drinks in the sand, covering them from being contaminated. Dream realizes, as Bad shrugs off his tank top, that he's never seen him outside of long sleeves. The entire time in the hotel, he never wore anything short. He tries not to stare, but it's in vain. Bad glances up at him, noticing his staring-not-staring, hands going up to cover the scars.

"It's okay," Bad reassures him, though he self consciously rubs his forearms. "Don't feel bad. I know they're noticeable."

"I... I didn't know," is all Dream can say.

He never thought that Bad would do something like that. His head has been so wrapped up in his own misery, that he never even thought about the implications of those unhealthy things.

"How long?" He asks before he can stop himself.

Skeppy opens his mouth, probably to berate him for asking, but Bad stops him.

"It's okay," he repeats. For that moment, Dream knows he's talking to himself. "It's been a while. I don't really pay attention to the time."

"I'm- I'm glad you're doing better." It's a meek reply, but the smile Bad gives him relaxes him.

"Me too."

Skeppy rubs the sunscreen into Bad's pale skin, gentle and silent with the task. They're so in love with each other that it's a wonder how they haven't been together for years. He yearns to care for George that way.

Dream stuffs the card under their lunches before the others notice and hurls himself towards the water. The sun strikes the earth with a mighty fist, and he allows the ocean to cool his burning

back. Skeppy follows, dunking himself under to get his hair wet. Bad joins with an inflated beach ball, and they spend most of the afternoon tossing it back and forth, having to go further and further into the ocean as the wind picks it up.

He gets to ignore the pressure of moving on in the ocean, where silence consumes him and gives him momentary bliss. A school of fish zip between his legs as he forces his eyes open underwater. Gradients of greens and blue saturate his vision, feet kicking up the sand. When he comes back up, Skeppy spikes the beach ball against his head.

At first, he feared that he'd be jealous the entire time, watching them be unafraid of being affectionate in public. But then he sees Bad scolding Skeppy for scraping his knee during a race on shore. The pain he expects to surface doesn't come. Instead it's champagne, warm and happy in his veins.

The drinks remain icy cold in their cooler. When they return to the beach, they eat their sandwiches under the sun's harsh gaze. Bad's cheeks are tinged pink, Dream's shoulders sting with the telltale beginnings of sunburn, and Skeppy is untouched. Seagulls come begging, but Dream gets them to leave with a flap of his towel. The dry bread sticks to the roof of his mouth.

"So, how are you and George?" Skeppy asks with the innocence of someone out of the loop.

Dream taps the lid of his soda can. "We're... good, I think. It's been better, but we're getting there. I can actually do things without thinking of just him all the time."

"Sorry for bringing him up, I bet it's always coming up."

"I don't mind. I'm sure you guys keep getting questions about you two being together."

The smile on Skeppy's face sends a cool rush of contentment through his chest.

"You said earlier that you guys wanted to meet up soon," Bad says. "Are you still planning that?"

He remembers the loose thread, the one last step he needs to take. "Yeah, we are. Not any time soon, but- maybe soon. There's just one last thing I need to do."

--

The card is a bomb in his hand.

A holy item, the sacrament of his future. He stares at the cream colored envelope, the blank exterior enticing him to pull the pin and finally deal with the consequences. Dream turns it over in his shaking hand a few times. His thumb runs over the open flap. Underneath, he peaks a shimmering galaxy engraved into the paper. The letters are illegible without pulling it out fully.

It's not that big of a deal. This card shouldn't hold so much weight on his shoulders. He shouldn't be afraid that the words inside will return him to ruin. George wrote them. They won't change anything. But he's no longer shattered bones and broken skin. Time healed him, and now it's time to keep going. No matter what the future holds, he's going to love George, even if it means never getting to hold him again.

Dream gently tugs the grenade card out of the envelope, unable to still the nervous twitch of his fingers. He drops the envelope and stares at the live wire in his hand, unsure what he was expecting.

"... Oh my god, George."

It's a Valentine's Day card.

Gold accents glimmer against the thick navy blue paper, taking the shape of the galaxy around the sentence in the center. It's smooth, like velvet. Dream needs to read the front of the card a few times to make the words make sense in his head.

kiss me under the light of a million stars.

The tears are hot and relieved. He can't believe this idiot bought him a fucking Valentine's Day card three months in advance, despite not knowing what would happen in the future. Dream feels the deep grooves of a pen on the back of the card.

"Please don't destroy me. Please don't let it be the end."

With sweaty palms and a nervous heart, he opens the card.

Chapter End Notes

I went from too many fic ideas to none at all help
also that card is from the museum of natural history's website

Close The Distance

Chapter Summary

something new

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's not on purpose at first, him ignoring George's calls.

His phone rings and rings and rings, discord messages asking questions he expects. Dream tries to answer them, he really does, but he turns to concrete whenever his hand hovers over that green button, terror seizing all power from his body. Although he tries to pick it up, he can't. He doesn't want to. It's another step too scary to take.

The card holds nothing new. Reading it only reaffirms his fears and apprehensions of what comes next. He holds it to his chest, tears ignoring his efforts to keep going over the words, looking for secret meanings between periods and commas, but finds nothing except broken pieces left behind. Dream tries to make them fit, but they're not his alone to do so with.

Impatience is his fatal flaw. Making sense of a letter born from grief won't help him make sense of the things he spent months overthinking. George's fears will never make sense to Dream, but that is something he can live with, irrational or not. There are things he does George will never understand. That's okay, too. Honesty doesn't mean understanding.

Those thoughts, as terrifying as they are, comfort Dream. They tell him he's finally understanding some part of what George was going through, the overwhelming terror of consequence. There's infinite possibilities, ones where they crash and burn, where they last a lifetime, and where they never happen. He's willing to risk destruction for the chance to hold George again, just one more time if that's all he has.

After the first day, he stops reading the messages purposely, guilt infesting his thoughts with mud. Dream needs to think this through again, from the first day in that hotel down to the moment he started reading that letter, he needs to go over it all. Why, he doesn't know, but he stopped pretending he knows everything long ago, and he won't start again now. He needs to step back and understand not just himself but George, *his* feelings, *his* fears, *his* side of the story.

George must've been terrified during the fight, to see the cracks spreading through their foundation, the earth readying to swallow them both whole. He lashed out out of fear. Sure, it wasn't right, hardly justified, but Dream understands why. They ended up in a self-fulfilled prophecy, damned by their own hands. All he wanted to do was try and stop it from happening, but it was too late.

Dream was too far in, too consumed by his yearning to take a step back and wonder about consequences. Now that consequences are all he can think about, the guilt of pushing too far. He tells himself George couldn't have known either. It's neither of their faults. Circumstance was not on their side.

After three days, George stops messaging back completely. Dream reads them out of curiosity, and his chest burns with the desire to respond. They're not demanding of his attention. The messages are simple. Good morning texts, pictures of Cat and his new puppy, breakfast snaps, ideas for videos, and good nights. He's patient, far more patient than he's ever been before. This is just delaying the inevitable, but Dream has been stuck in a stalemate since returning to Florida, neither one able or willing to make the first move.

Somehow, Dream falls asleep, exhaustion the culprit, but wakes up to the sound of his phone buzzing. He blinks hard at the dim screen. His vision sharpens to make out George's face and name displayed.

"What the..." without thinking, Dream answers, not remembering his vigil.

"Oh, thank god, I thought you weren't going to answer," George huffs with relief, sounding tired and out of breath.

His clock tells him it's nearly two in the morning, but George sounds way too tired for it to be five in the UK, given that he's an early morning person. It must be an emergency, there's no other reason he'd be calling him in the dead of night. Dream grimaces as he turns on his bedside lamp, already getting ready to bolt if he has to.

"A-are you okay?" He asks, slipping on his sweatshirt that sits on his floor.

"Oh! Yeah, yeah, I'm fine." His actions slow down. *"I just- I need a ride."*

"Okay? And you're calling me because...?"

"Well." George chuckles, stammering before he starts making real words. *"It's a long story."*

In the background, Dream hears a female voice announcing a flight from New York to Miami that just landed. Realization.

"George..." he begins carefully, not wanting to misinterpret anything, "Are you in Florida?"

Silence, except for more flight directives.

"My therapist said I was thinking too far ahead in the future and that I should live more in the moment. They suggested trying to be more impulsive like you, as long as I don't break the law or anything." George's voice vibrates against the phone with anxious excitement. *"And I tested negative for COVID, so I booked a flight to see you. I wanted it to be more of a surprise, but forgot I can't get a rental."*

Patches meows, annoyed at the bright light in her face, and leaves.

Dream tosses the covers off his legs, still half asleep as he searches for clean socks. "Which airport are you at?"

As George describes his surroundings, reading the name off his ticket, he finishes getting dressed. Dream realizes he's all the way in Miami, and groans as he rushes out of his door to the driveway. The adrenaline rush wakes him up fully, buzzing with the urge to hold George as soon as possible. He's so close, so far, so much in between.

"Did you really have to book a flight all the way in Miami?" He starts his car, sending a quick text to his neighbor, asking to check in on Patches for him if he's not back by noon. "That's a three hour drive."

“What? Oh, shit, you’re right. Whoops.”

As he gets on the highway, George sighs.

“So, how are you?”

Dream snorts. “I’m doing great. I’m driving across the state with two hours of sleep to pick up the love of my life. How are you?”

“I’m hungry. I didn’t eat all day today. Well, yesterday. Oh, there’s a McDonalds in here.”

For the drive, they talk. They catch up from the few days where Dream ignored him, though not much has happened between then and now. He tells George that he read the letter, and that’s why he never responded.

“It’s not your fault,” he explains. “I just needed a few days to think things through, air out my brain. Your timing is getting better.”

George slurps his coffee loudly, filling the car speakers with disgusting sounds. “Well, I’m glad you didn’t leave me stranded. Sorry for making you drive so far to get me, I forgot that you have to be twenty-five to rent a car here.”

“It’s fine, I don’t mind. Did you have a hotel booked, or...”

Or are you staying with me? The question goes unsaid, but George understands.

Dream only has one bedroom. If he stays with him, it’ll be exactly like the hotel. Either one of them on the couch, or they close the distance.

“I wanted to talk about that with you, actually. I haven’t booked a room, but I can if you want. I get if you don’t want me to stay somewhere else, since this is all still pretty fresh-“

“George.” The blunt force of Dream’s voice interrupts his stammering. “What do you want?”

“I... I want you.”

Something changes in Dream’s blood. “So, what’s the problem?”

George makes a sound like the air’s been punched out of him. His breath picks up pace. “Oh, my god. I can’t believe I flew all the way here without even telling you. What was I thinking? You could’ve hated me, for all I knew, and was just trying to spare my feelings. I didn’t even tell anyone I was leaving to America, what if I’d-”

“Dude, chill. Take a breath.” When Dream hears him inhale, he continues. “You’re okay. You made it. See? I’m right here, my sweet, sonorous voice coming to pick you up.”

George slowly exhales, the closeness sending goosebumps up his arms. A few seconds pass with them exchanging deep breaths, the soft rumble of Dream’s car filling their silence. A flight from Miami to the Caribbean announces its departure. Around the one hour mark, he starts to blast cool air through the vents to keep himself awake.

“I know this might be too soon for you...” George is a soft whisper surrounding him. “But I couldn’t wait for the right moment. I knew if I didn’t take this chance now, I would never have the courage to later on.”

“It’ll always be too soon. I’m just glad that I’ll finally be able to hold you again.”

He lets out a breathy giggle. “*Is that really all you’re gonna do?*”

“What, you want me to do something else?” Dream smiles at the sharp intake of breath.

“*I’d prefer it if you kissed me.*”

“Yeah? Where? Just your lips? I have a couple ideas of where else I want to kiss.”

A rumbling groan escapes George’s throat. “*Don’t do this to me, Dream. I am sitting on a bench in an airport, eating my McDonald’s breakfast, and you’re trying to get me all hot and bothered.*”

“Is it working?”

Dream hears the crunch of him biting into his hashbrown.

“Alright, alright, I’ll stop. But just you know, the second I see you, nothing will stop me from having you in my arms again.”

“*I wouldn’t mind that.*”

Two hours in, and Dream’s eyes start to turn to concrete, slipping closed every once in a while before snapping back open. Luckily, the highway is mostly empty, so his small swerves don’t disturb any cars around. He rubs his eyes hard enough to send stars.

“Hey, can you talk about something?” He asks, hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel. “I can feel myself falling asleep.”

“*Oh. Sure. What do you want me to talk about?*”

“Those video ideas you had. I want to know about those.”

George rambles on and on for the hour it takes Dream to take an exit to a new highway, drive down a long stretch of road, and park in the front of the airport. He glances in through the glass doors, trying to see if he can make out George’s body, but fails, and decides to go in.

Mask on and keys in hand, he makes his way inside. There’s hardly any signs of life given how early in the morning it is.

“You said you were on a bench, right?” Dream squints at the harsh lighting above him. “I don’t see you?”

“*Wait, you’re here already? What’re you wearing?*”

He walks down through the baggage carnivals, looking for any sign of your friend. “I’m wearing a grey long sleeve and blue and white sweats. What’re you wearing?”

“*Uh, don’t laugh. I’m wearing one of your hoodies.*”

Dream laughs.

“*Hey! I said don’t laugh!*”

“I’m sorry!” He covers his mouth as he lets out a sharp whistle, wheezing and unable to stop himself. “That- that’s just so cute.”

“*Wait, I can hear you. I know that wheeze. Where are you?*”

He spins around, not seeing anyone except for a family and a sleeping flight attendant. “I’m in front of the McDonalds.”

“Stay right there, I’m coming!”

From behind him, he hears heavy thunking and sees a familiar blob plodding down the escalator, dragging a large suitcase behind him, book bag slung over his shoulder. George wasn’t lying when he said he was wearing the hoodie he forgot in the hotel, neon green fabric illuminated against the stark white lights. His hair is a bird’s nest, clothing wrinkled from the flight, mask pushed down to his chin, and the phone in his hand echoes the huffs he makes with every step.

He makes it to the bottom and stops on the platform. Dream freezes, hand stuck to his ear. They stare, a contest of who missed who more, who’s learned from their mistakes, who wants to close the distance first.

This is it. The moment Dream’s been imagining for months, when he can finally look George in the eye after everything he’s done to him. All those cold words he cut into his heart with. The soft kisses peppering his skin. Silence tore them further apart. Time brings them back to each other. The good and the bad, separate and together.

He’s thought of this day over and over, trying to figure out what he’d say, what he’d do, if he’d be happy or upset. Dream expects a shock of anger, fueled by seeing the perpetrator of his heartache, the man who could destroy him like nobody else can, only to rebuild him with the promise of new memories. The urge to yell at him, leave him stranded, forget he existed.

The anger doesn’t come. Instead, it’s hot waves of joyous tears. He’s crying at the sight of his best friend, who broke just as much as he did, who took steps to fix it, who loves him so much it nearly destroyed them both. They’re together again. The first few notes of *let the sun in* start up in the back of his mind.

Dream loves him, he decides, no matter what happens next.

George drops the suitcase, backpack slumping to the floor. His gaze never wavers from Dream’s, even when he lowers the phone from the ear. Tears turn his eyes into crystals. Dream finds it in himself to hang up, phone slipping into his pocket. Needles of terror stab into his heart as George starts to walk forward. Mesmerized, Dream does the same.

Suddenly, they’re sprinting, barreling towards each other, two meteors stuck in orbit with each other, and finally. Finally. They collide.

Chapter End Notes

so this is the end! I know it might be a little anticlimactic but I hope you guys enjoy it.
this has gotta be one of my favorite fics I've ever written :3c
if you wanna know when my next fics come out, please follow me on twitter
pythoneon, id really appreciate it! I try to update pretty regularly!
thank you guys so much for reading!!! <3

The Letter

Chapter Summary

George's letter.

Chapter Notes

so THIS is actually the last chapter lol.

not like an official one, but I couldn't find a proper place in the story to just insert the letter, so here it is.

anyways go stream agoraphobic. Love you all <3

UPDATE:

so I'm rewriting Let The Sun In, and for the anniversary, I'm uploading the first chapter to my ko-fi! if you're interested in it (it's free) you can check it out with the link below!

ko-fi.com/neonpython

Dream.

Clay.

The room is colder without you here. I can't sleep. My body hurts. Do you think you can die from a heartbreak? I don't think so, but that might change soon. I don't even know why I bought this card, thinking I'd be too scared to give it to you. Now that I'm writing in it, I know I won't. If you're reading this, then I guess I'm not a complete coward.

I finally have the words for when we get here. I'm sorry it took so long for me to find them.

There's so many of them. If I don't get them out, they'll consume me. I want to say so goddamn much to you. Like I'm sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. I'll say it a million times if I have to.

None of this was supposed to happen. You weren't supposed to love me back. My plan was to force down my feelings, wait for them to vanish, and then continue forward, none the wiser. But god, you were so beautiful. Your hair was longer than I thought it'd be, and I didn't expect your eyes to be so... bright. I know you said that they were green, but they looked like sunflowers to me. And your stubble. God, how it felt on my skin. You felt rough. Yet you were so soft. In that moment, I would've done anything for you.

I thought this trip would be confirmation that I let go. Seeing you in person, finally connecting a face to your name, would allow me to move on. But it had the opposite effect. You were real and within my grasp, and that made me insane. All those impossible fantasies I had were suddenly possible, not just possible, about to be reality, and the fear of loving you hit me like an unexpected storm. So, I tried to keep you at a distance, walled myself up and tried to enjoy everyone's presence with equal fervor, not just yours.

But you knew how to break through my barriers. Do you know how scary it is, to love someone so much you can't even keep them out? I didn't want to let you in, I didn't want to *want* you. I didn't want to get too close because I was afraid of how it would end, how I would eventually hurt you, and our friendship would crumble. What we built together, all of us, Bad, Sapnap, you and I, I didn't want to risk it because I had feelings for you. Our worlds would end because I was reckless with myself.

Why did you have to be so much more than what I was expecting? Why do you have to look at me like I'm the center of your universe? Why did your fingertips leave lightning scars behind in their wake? Why did I make you cry? Why did I say it didn't mean anything to me when it meant the world? Why why why why WHY WHY

So many questions. I don't think I want the answers.

Let The Sun In. How ironic. That song, why did you focus on it too? Did Sapnap tell you what I said about you? That you were my sun? So golden and bright, loving and warm. That you pulled me in and kept me close, and I was stuck in your gravity. I can't stop listening to it, and I know it might be wrong, but I looked at your Spotify account. You've been listening to it. It's so happy, so hopeful. So wrong.

We could've been that. We could've been so much, but I fucked up our chances. I should just fuck it up the rest of the way, hurt you worse and let it all burn down. Pour the salt in the wound now. Watch everything turn to rubble. I should make you hate me now so you can't hate me if we end up fixing this.

I know it's not your fault, but I want to blame you so badly. I want it to be on you, not me. But all you did was be honest. I can't blame you for being impulsive and careless, for not realizing how terrified I was with how fast we were going. I didn't tell you anything. It was my fault, though. I never told you what I was feeling.

I won't blame you if you never want to talk to me again. Honestly, it would surprise me if you'll answer any of my calls when we get home. You have such a big heart, Clay, you might not even care and blame yourself for what happened. I want you to know- it's not your fault. All you did was love too much, and I was too afraid.

But I promise I'll make it up to you. I want to fix what I broke, but I don't know if it's too soon. I still need space to figure my own shit out before I overwhelm you. But I'll do anything to regain your trust. I'll fly to Florida if I need to do it in person. Maybe I should do that. A stupid letter isn't enough. The distance is already killing me.

If you don't hate me, that would be a miracle, because you should despise me. I definitely deserve it for all the things I said. But your heart is too good. You wouldn't hate me, even when it's justified. I hope you don't, but at this point, nothing surprises me. I understand if you never want to talk to me again. I hope you will, but I don't deserve that right now.

Eurydice and Orpheus.

I think about that story a lot. I know how much you love your Greek tragedies. Lovers torn apart by death, predicted to only want, never have. I wonder if we'll end up like them, just two ghosts of what we could be, haunting us with promises of a dead future.

Maybe I already looked back. Maybe our chances are already dust.

Fuck.

I love you. I should've told you before this happened, before I fucked it all up. Now I can say it, and now I'll keep saying it until I can tell you in person.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

And I'm sorry.

-George

PS: tell patches hello for me.

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